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SHAKESPEARE TO SHAW

STUDIES IN THE LIFE'S WORK OF SIX DRAMATISTS OF THE ENGLISH STAGE

BY

CECIL FERARD ARMSTRONG

AUTHOR OF 'A CENTURY OF GREAT ACTORS' 'THE DRAMATIC AUTHOR'S COMPANION' 'THE ACTOR'S COMPANION,' ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY—A RETROSPECT	1
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	22
WILLIAM CONGREVE	128
RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN	147
THOMAS WILLIAM ROBERTSON	168
ARTHUR WING PINERO	206
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW	246
VALEDICTORY—A PROSPECT	324

INTRODUCTORY—A RETROSPECT.

This introduction is not an apology, either for intruding yet another book of criticism on the back of a weary world, or to the many great dramatists whose names do not figure among the six in these pages. These names are not meant, by any means, to be the six greatest or even six great ones. Far be it from me to say who shall be greatest or even great. But I have chosen six who seem to me to stand out as landmarks, men who either crowned or inaugurated an epoch. There are some long intervals between the names, but there have been some very long ones in the English drama. Great dramatists seem to come in groups, so do great actors, and it is a curious fact that the great actors generally seem to come in when the great dramatists go out. Perhaps this is a wise dispensation of Providence, for most original dramatists write a little ahead of their time. Or perhaps it is because the great dramatist puts the actor in his proper place, and the stars of his day keep their right place in the firmament and do not jump out of it, or try to and become suns! Burbage is known as a great interpreter of Shakespeare, Garrick as a very great actor, an interpreter of character, who employed Shakespeare as a means of showing himself off, far more than he employed himself as a means of showing off Shakespeare. Let us hope that the latter is the real reason why the actor seems a little bit subdued when the author is on the scenes.

There is in this book, and there was in fact, a very long interval between the Shakespeare group and the Congreve constellation! Shakespeare and his immediate successors, who were really his contemporaries, for he stopped work early, were so good and so real that they frightened the country, who really did not know what was going to happen, and feared, perhaps, that folk would soon begin writing modern plays! There is sometimes almost the same sort of feeling in the air now. So theatrical performances were first curtailed and then stopped altogether, and silenced for a while the wonderful Shakespearean group containing Ben Jonson, Marston, Heywood, Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher and the gloomy John Webster about whom so little is known, and who is considered by some critics to be the greatest dramatist after the Master himself. When the theatres reopened at the Restoration it was not to admit a great dramatist, although it did admit a very great man. John Dryden preferred popularity to immortality, and luxury to poverty, and frankly wrote plays to please the public. He was apparently a great and wonderful landmark in his time, a tree that towered above all others, but has not weathered the storms of the centuries. Practically nothing is known, seen, or heard of his dramatic work nowadays, outside the circle of those interested in the theatre or literature. And inside these circles practically all that is known of his exploits as a dramatist is that he wrote a play called "All for Love," which was a poor version of Antony and Cleopatra.

There is a different tale to tell, of course, of his exquisite lyrical powers, but even they, perhaps, are still hidden a little in the smoke of his pot-boiling, or dazzled by the glare of his extraordinary fame. Every one has, of course, heard of the great John Dryden,

but only the select and sagacious few have read anything considerable of his.

Many and many a time has the present writer pointed out Dryden's name to visitors, carved by himself, on a bench at Westminster School; visitors who were thrilled at the mention of it and looked hard and long at it, but judiciously looked the other way when his work was mentioned. Dryden occupied all the literary thrones in his day, and was the only person fitted to occupy them, but he seems to have been a very constitutional monarch, and his speeches from the dramatic throne are about as exciting as speeches generally are from any throne! His plays are most certainly not plays at all. They read very much better than they act, and do not, as a matter of fact, read particularly well.

I rather gather that Dryden fell into the error, not unknown at the present day, of thinking that because he was a literary genius, therefore he must be a dramatic one too. Though he has a gossamer touch in lyrics, his hand on the drama is very heavy, the racy Restoration audiences probably got very much more amusement in front of the curtain than they did from the stage during Dryden's tedious heroics. He was not a dramatist, but a dramatic nurse who nursed the drama when it was in a very bad way, and, to do him justice, nursed it exceedingly well. He had splendid qualifications for the post, fine literary and even dramatic judgment, and absolute honesty. He was as fair and just to others as he was to himself, to whom he was often scathingly just. We shall see how he discovered Congreve and set him on his feet. It is a pity he could not keep him there, but there is no keeping a snob from the snobbery. Dryden shared honours with Sir William Davenant, who is famous for being the first manager

and author to obtain a licence for women to act in his plays. The first actress is said to have been Mrs. Coleman, who played the part of "Ianthe" in Davenant's "Siege of Rhodes". Davenant's plays, as can be seen from some of their titles, "The History of Sir Francis Drake," "The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru," were political and popular as well as heroic. Indeed they were almost topical, and were probably very much more alive at the time they were written than Dryden's were, but they are quite as dead now. Prominent later contemporaries of Dryden's were Nathaniel Lee and Thomas Otway, Cambridge and Oxford men respectively. Lee began life as an actor, but gave it up because he had an excitable temperament, the very reason for which many actors, nowadays, take it up. He dealt in somewhat heavy tragedy, with heavy villains or heavy dragoons for his heroes,—Nero, Cæsar Borgia, Hannibal and Alexander the Great! His plays are now as dead as their heroes.

Thomas Otway also started life as an actor, but gave it up because he could not act, another reason why some people nowadays seem to take it up. His plays seem, on the whole, to have been very disgusting and decadent, but one of them, "Venice Preserved," survived its author for many years, and indeed until quite recently held its place in the traffic of the stage. It is a thorough actor's play and was a great favourite with Garrick and Kean and their contemporaries. It seems to have been one of those plays that the acting kept alive, not that kept the acting alive. Neither Dryden, Lee, nor Otway were original dramatists. Dryden seems to have modelled himself carefully upon the great Frenchmen, Otway and Lee upon the Shakespearean group. They none of them had the journalistic touch that seems so

essential to the dramatist. They did not mirror their time, but Congreve did, and he is at the head of the next great group, and a very brilliant group it is. Had it been as clean as it was brilliant it might have been shining still.

Congreve is dealt with at length in another place. The group of which he was the head and forefront consists of himself, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. Wycherley is very like Congreve, only, if possible, even more coarse and obscene, though it is difficult to see how he could have been. The difference between the talents of the two dramatists was neatly pointed when they buried Congreve in Westminster Abbey, but Wycherley in St. Paul's Cathedral!

Sir John Vanbrugh, who was an architect as well as a dramatist, always preferred to be known as the latter, which probably means that he was not so good in that capacity. He was at one time an author-manager, with Betterton, of the Haymarket Theatre.

His best known play has the alluring title of "The Relapse; or Virtue in Danger". It survived him a good many years, but did not survive his buildings. When he died they inscribed upon his grave the request:—

> Lie heavy on him, earth, for he
> Laid many a heavy load on thee.

It is conceivable that this referred to some of his plays, as well as to his buildings.

George Farquhar, the last, but by no means the least, of the group, should perhaps have figured at greater length in this book, along with the three other Irishmen. Apparently he was the first Irishman to adopt the profession in which so many of them have since excelled. His "Beaux' Stratagem" held the stage for very many years,

as did "Sir Henry Wildair" and "The Recruiting Officer".

The first and last of these are very closely identified with Garrick. Archer in "The Beaux' Stratagem" was one of his favourite characters, and in "The Recruiting Officer" he made his first appearance on any stage. Sir Henry Wildair was the favourite part of Peg Woffington.

After this period there comes another long interval of mediocrity, although some famous hands tended the lamp. Addison, Steele and Fielding all wrote plays, but their work in other directions only has survived. Colley Cibber is a famous Jack-of-all-trades. He was an actor, playwright and poet laureate. Some are born with the laurel, some achieve it, and some have it thrust upon them! Colley Cibber seems to have belonged to the second category, and to have achieved the laurel quite as much through the excellence of his character as his poetry. There is a high moral tone running through his plays, indeed such a thing showed signs, at this date, of infecting the whole English stage.

It was evidently a sort of reaction from the Restoration licentiousness.

But Colley Cibber was not without a sense of humour and he wrote some good comedies, amongst which "She Would and She Would Not" strutted and fretted for a long hour upon the stage. John Gay was famous for his "Beggar's Opera," produced in 1728, and which broke all records for a run at that time. Garrick and the two Colemans then paved the way for two more giants, Goldsmith and Sheridan. However, it is scarcely true to say that Garrick paved the way for Goldsmith, for he seems to have done what he could to put obstacles

into it. Another dramatist whom he rejected was John Home, whose "Douglas," written in 1756, retained its popularity for over a hundred years. It is heavy, but heroic with plenty of popular sentiment and soliloquy. Garrick's contributions to the written word are, of course, completely overshadowed by his mighty services to the acted one. All the same he did a great deal of very useful hack work for the stage of his day, improving and adapting plays. But when he set out to improve Shakespeare he did it neither wisely nor well. "The Clandestine Marriage," which he wrote in collaboration with George Coleman, has been played in London within very recent times.

But of course Goldsmith and Sheridan are the bright particular stars of this epoch. The latter is dealt with at length elsewhere, the former wrote only two plays, one of which is immortal. "The Good-natured Man" and "She Stoops to Conquer". Oliver Goldsmith was a wonderful and lovable being. He was Jack of all literary trades and master of all as well. He was born at Ferney in County Longford, Ireland, on 29 November, 1728. As he was a younger son he did not, at first, have many advantages, beginning his education by studying at the village school. But his precocious talents soon manifested themselves, and, by his mother's intervention and with the help of a kind uncle, he was given a better education, finally entering Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar in 1744.

There he fell out with his tutor, who seems always to have had a grudge against Oliver, of whom he was probably insanely jealous. Oliver ran away from Trinity, intending to cross the water to England, but he spent all his money in Dublin, and was for some days on the verge of starvation. Then he sent for his brother Henry,

who came quickly upon the scene, fed and clothed him, and patched up the difference with the tutor. In 1749 he took his B.A. degree. In 1750 his father died, and Goldsmith left college and made some efforts to enter the Church, but the Bishop refused to ordain him, chiefly, it is said, because he presented himself for ordination in a pair of scarlet knee-breeches. Then, through the kind offices of his uncle, Mr. Contarine, he procured a tutorship, which, however, he soon relinquished, and determined to set sail for America.

So he bought a horse and rode to Cork, but, as usual, had spent all his money before he left his own country, and the prodigal again returned home, where he arrived on the verge of starvation. But kind Uncle Contarine came again to the rescue, and Oliver was given fifty pounds and sent off to England to study law in the Temple. But again he succeeded in losing it all, being relieved of most of it by a sharper in Dublin, before he was to have set sail for England. Again he returned home destitute, and again Uncle Contarine, whose generosity seems to have been boundless, came to his rescue. This time he sent Oliver to Edinburgh to study medicine. He remained in Edinburgh two years, after which he left, without a diploma, to pursue his studies in Leyden. On his way to Leyden another misadventure befell him, but this time it was a fortunate one. The ship in which he sailed, the "St. Andrew," put into Newcastle-on-Tyne, on account of bad weather. Goldsmith went ashore for a spree with some fellow-passengers who, it appears, were Scottish soldiers who had been fighting for the French, and were returning from a recruiting tour. The party were all surprised and arrested, Goldsmith among them. He languished in durance vile for some days before he could convince his

captors that he was innocent, and when he was released, found that his ship had sailed without him. Poor Oliver's ship never came home! This one eventually foundered with all hands before it reached Bordeaux!

Goldsmith remained for a year at Leyden, getting into many difficulties through his reckless habits, and getting out of them through the generosity of his friends. His tuition fees and expenses were paid by his generous uncle Contarine. Eventually he managed to save up a little money, and meditated a short tour on the Continent, but, as usual, he got no farther than the place he started from. The gorgeous Dutch tulips were just beginning to bloom, and Oliver bethought himself of how his kind uncle Contarine loved flowers, so he spent all his substance in bulbs and roots, which he sent off to his uncle. Then, of course, his continental tour had to be performed on foot, and so it was.

He wandered all through Flanders, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, stopping to pick the flowers by the way and gathering some of them into his beautiful poem "The Traveller".

He generally managed to find bed and board at some monastery or other, where he earned them by his scholarship and by playing haunting Irish melodies on his little German flute. To quote his own words: "I fought my way from convent to convent; walked from city to city; examined mankind more nearly; and, if I may so express it, saw both sides of the picture".

Whilst in Italy his kind uncle sent him some money, but this was the last remittance. His benefactor died, and he was thrown entirely upon his own resources. Undergoing unmitigated hardships he struggled back to London, which he reached in 1756.

In London he began life as an usher at a school, then

became a medical practitioner in Southwark with, as he expressed it, "an extensive circle of patients but no fees".

Then he had a really good appointment offered him as a physician to some English factory in a far Eastern colony; which, unable to face the enforced exile, he refused. But he was now beginning to feel his way with his pen, and, but for his reckless habits, would soon have been in possession of a comfortable income.

His first poem, "The Traveller," was published in 1764. "The Vicar of Wakefield," which he sold, or rather which Dr. Johnson sold for him, for sixty pounds, in 1766, and his first play, "The Good-natured Man," in 1768. It was produced at Covent Garden under the management of Coleman. It is rather a naïve kind of business, in five acts, following the fashion of that time. The theme, that of a good-natured man who is always endeavouring to please others for his own sake, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, is full of promise, which is perhaps not quite fulfilled.

The author has not made quite the most of his subject, but he has made a good deal of it and the play is cleverly constructed according to the ideas of those days. Five short acts with all roads leading to the same spot at the close of the play, where all the characters are invariably gathered together. The characterization is good, and carried along on very sophisticated lines. Honeywood, the good-natured man, who makes the best of everything and everybody, is contrasted with Croaker whose name of course proclaims his nature, a silly custom in nomenclature which still survived, to hint at what a play was about, and take the edge off one's appetite. A certain Mr. Lofty is, if anybody is, the villain of the play. He only tells lies, it is true, but he tells them very badly. His reformation at the end of the play is rather delicious.

"I've resolved upon reformation. . . . I now begin to find that the man who first invented the art of speaking truth, was a much cunninger fellow than I thought him. . . ."

But of course the chief charm of the play lies in the writing of it, which is extraordinarily graceful and polished, and worthy of Congreve at his best, without his weaknesses. There are plenty of wise little saws and moral maxims scattered throughout the dialogue which is florid and ornate, the characters speak in rounded periods, and phrase their sentences, but the rhyming tag of the Restoration had, by this time, fortunately disappeared. Few fashions are more pronounced or change more rapidly than those of stage dialogue. At the first hearing or reading "The Good-natured Man" produces a remarkable effect of spontaneity and ease, but a closer inspection reveals signs of great care.

Goldsmith's next and best play, "She Stoops to Conquer," was produced at Covent Garden on 15 March, 1773, since when it has held the boards as one of the most popular comedies ever written. It was produced under the management of Coleman. Garrick had the refusal of it, but required alterations to be made, which Goldsmith would not agree to. Eventually, however, some of them had to be made. In certain places the play failed to please, indeed it repelled, on the first night, and considerable cutting had to be done, and the revised edition is that with which we are all familiar. The success of the play is fully deserved; for it is an admirable comedy, showing an enormous advance upon "The Good-natured Man". Construction, characterization, and dialogue all show an immense improvement. The construction is simpler, closer, and almost ideal in point of the unity of time. The whole

action takes place practically within the space of twenty-four hours. The characterization is very much less conventional and stagey and very much more life-like. Young Marlowe may, perhaps, be a little overdrawn; he is generally over-acted.

Tony Lumkin is a real creation, and the remaining characters seem to me to be drawn more from life than from the stage, or theatrical annals. The author seems to have gained, from his success in clinging closely to traditions at his first attempt, the confidence to break away from them, and follow his own bent. Indeed, in some ways, "She Stoops to Conquer" seems to me an advance even upon Sheridan. This is especially noticeable in the dialogue, which is wonderfully natural and easy. The characters do not talk pedantically in polished periods and phrases as they do in Congreve, or even Sheridan, but naturally, as they do, or rather did, in life. There is nothing stagey in their talk, only something that sounds to our ears a little quaint and old-fashioned. The polish is not literary but gentlemanly. The fun is, of course, inclined to horseplay, but Tony Lumkin's fun would be, and he is the *deus ex machinâ* of the play. But it is not coarse play, although it seems to have been so on the first performance. Even the nomenclature is reasonable and sensible and does not tell too much. In Congrevian times one could foretell the plot of the play by a perusal of the list of characters.

Dramatic licence is, of course, occasionally in evidence, as when Marlowe does not recognize Kate in a change of dress, or Mrs. Hardcastle her own garden in its night dress. After writing another play or two Goldsmith might, perhaps, have been able to dispense with this sort of thing.

It is an unfortunate thing for the drama, but perhaps fortunate for Sheridan, that he wrote no more. Sheridan, whilst a stronger writer than Goldsmith, with more force in his dramatic ideas, lacked Goldsmith's broad experience and outlook on life. Sheridan regarded the world as his audiences, Goldsmith looked upon it as his stage. And the one scrutinized fiercely, whilst the other beamed benignly. There seems to have been something almost Pickwickian about Goldsmith. But he was, as he describes himself, a "citizen of the world," and he could, if he would, have led the drama away from the artificial glare of the footlights into the fresh open air. But unfortunately he could never stick to one thing for any length of time, and his fame as a dramatist practically rests upon "She Stoops to Conquer," a very sure if not a very broad foundation.

Goldsmith died at his rooms in the Temple, Bolt Court, on 4 April, 1774, from the effects of a nervous fever, and it is feared of other things as well. The doctor in attendance upon him said, "Your pulse is in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever which you have; is your mind at ease?" "No," said Goldsmith, "it is not," and with that died. What it was he had upon his mind no one, perhaps, will ever know. He had certainly a great load of debt, but was not usually very much concerned on that account. But for it he would have been buried in Westminster Abbey; as it was he was laid to rest in the Temple burying ground.

A nation that honours her mighty dead by burying them in a national Valhalla might, perhaps, honour them still further by paying the bill. If it is not done by this time it surely should be. A marble tablet was eventually put up to Goldsmith's memory in the Abbey,

with an imperishable Latin epitaph written by Dr. Johnson.

Goldsmith had, perhaps, the most impressive lying-in-state of anyone who ever died. All day long, crowds thronged the little staircase in Bolt Court. The poor, the infirm, old and outcast wept for their benefactor. Goldsmith was generally reduced to his last penny, and some one else usually got that. Edmund Burke burst into tears at the news of his death, David Garrick was genuinely affected, and Reynolds painted no more that day. This last from the hard-working and somewhat dour President was significant. Goldsmith was, of course, almost immediately succeeded by Sheridan, and since those days, perhaps, the English drama has produced no serious dramatist who is entitled to the rank of a "classic"; although at the present moment there are some promising ones peeping above the horizon, and one high in the sky who may well earn the distinction.

Tom Robertson only achieved it with the play called "Caste," but his influence upon dramatic conditions has been enormous, and for that reason he is included amongst the six I have chosen. Lord Lytton's "Money" is more of a curiosity than a classic.

During the early and middle portions of the eighteenth century the comic muse flourished exceedingly, and the sacred lamp of burlesque burnt brightly, and was fortunate in having the greatest interpreter it has ever known, Frederick Robson. J. R. Planché and H. J. Byron were masters of the art of writing it. But comic writing generally reached its climax in Sir W. S. Gilbert, who carried it to perfection. He, in his own line, is of course a classic and always will be, and one of the most significant points in his work is that, although in a sense

topical, it is yet perennial. He shares with Shakespeare and others the essential journalistic touch.

Take, for instance, "Patience"; the æsthetic craze and its high priest are both dead, but the play lives on and is one of the most popular of the series. The secret of Gilbert's magic seems to me to lie in the sound common sense and clear sense of proportion behind his work. After all, what is a sense of humour but a sense of proportion? Take his advice to lovers in "The Yeomen of the Guard":—

> A man who would woo a fair maid,
> Should prentice himself to the trade;
> And study all day,
> In methodical way,
> How to flatter, cajole and persuade.

This is exaggerated, of course, but there is sound common sense and reason at the back of it, as many a man has realized after he has made a mess of things, and some men perhaps before making a success of them. There is great wisdom, too, in the Mikado's idea of trying to make the punishment fit the crime. Gilbert's topsy-turveydom is largely based upon the ability, shared with Bernard Shaw, to look at things from more than one point of view. Curiously enough this seems a very difficult thing to do, or at any rate very few people can do it. They seem to gaze at their own point of view in a mesmeric stare, and are utterly unable to remove their eyes from it for one second. The plot in Gilbert's plays generally goes through the process of tying itself up into a dreadful knot, getting tighter and tighter, and then suddenly jerking itself straight with the greatest ease at the end of the play, which with him is generally the end of the second act. There is no straining or forcing, and the way out is usually as simple as Portia's in

"The Merchant of Venice". Like Shakespeare in that great play, Gilbert generally prepares the ground with a cunningly hidden little slip-knot somewhere. I think "The Yeomen of the Guard" is really the most dramatic of the operas and "The Mikado" the funniest and cleverest. "Fallen Fairies," which was quite recently produced, deserved a greater success than it achieved. There was an arresting idea behind it. A lot of women live in a beautiful heaven, on the other side of a cloud. Up comes a man from the earth below, and he has not been in the retreat long before a change for the worse comes over the place. Jealousy, hatred, and malice find entrance, until, after having reduced the place to ruins, the man returns to earth. Then the fairies wake up. It has all been an ugly dream, and has vanished leaving not a wrack behind.

One ponders serious problems after this play and wonders which is the better, a fallen fairy or a risen monkey.

I believe that if Gilbert had written the libretto of this play in earlier days, before his hand had lost some of its cunning, or perhaps before we had grown used to the cunning, and whilst Sir Arthur Sullivan was still there to compose the music, "Fallen Fairies" would have been one of his greatest successes.

Melodrama flourished very exceedingly in early and mid-Victorian times, and perhaps its most successful exponent was Dion Boucicault, whose Irish dramas are still "on the road". A sort of glorified historical blank verse melodrama found a not very able exponent in W. G. Wills. He owed his best successes, "Faust," "Louis XI," and "Charles I" to the acting of Sir Henry Irving, and "Olivia," which was an adaptation of "The Vicar of Wakefield," to Goldsmith and Ellen Terry.

Many purely literary lights of these latter days have attempted the drama, and their efforts have gone the way such efforts often do. Charles Reade, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Louis Stevenson and George Meredith all wrote plays which are now seldom read and never acted. Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray have all been adapted. The most successful of the Scott adaptations were "Rob Roy" and "The Bride of Lammermoor". "Rob Roy" owes its success chiefly to the popularity of one character, Bailie Nichol Jarvie. "The Bride of Lammermoor" was produced by Sir Henry Irving at the Lyceum Theatre under the title of "The Master of Ravenswood," but it was not one of his most successful productions. In recent years Mr. Martin Harvey also produced a version of it, with which he did not do very well. "Ivanhoe" has, of course, been repeatedly adapted, and is being played at the moment of writing at the Lyceum Theatre, London.

"A Tale of Two Cities" has proved the most popular of Dickens' books on the stage. More than one version of it has been highly successful. But both "David Copperfield" and "Nicholas Nickleby" are disappointing when seen on the boards.

"Vanity Fair," "The Newcomes" and "Esmond" have all been adapted for the stage with only moderate success.

On the whole it would seem that a really successful play seldom emanates from the study. It must come from either the life of the times, or the green room, so to speak.

Great dramatists have seldom been students, but have generally been folk who have frequented either green rooms or the highways and hedges, or both.

To come to still more modern times, when Pinero

reigned supreme, his nearest competitor was perhaps Henry Arthur Jones, who began with a first-rate melodrama, "The Silver King," and finally settled down into sprightly, witty, social comedies of which the best are perhaps "The Liars" and "The Case of Rebellious Susan".

He has written other and more serious works which, however, have not been taken quite so seriously as perhaps he hoped. But he has really little to complain of, and his is a very noteworthy contribution to the English drama.

The next really successful dramatist appeared with meteoric brilliancy. Oscar Wilde's four principal plays are "Lady Windermere's Fan," "An Ideal Husband," "A Woman of No Importance" and "The Importance of Being Earnest". The last is by far the best and, I believe, the only one that will ultimately survive. The others are all very telling, very dramatic, and very brilliant, but are not always either sincere or convincing. Oscar Wilde had a brilliant wit and a wonderful facility in, and trick of, epigram, with a real *flair* for what is telling and dramatic. In fact he dazzles one, but, when the glamour is over, one realizes it is only a firework after all, not a genuine beacon. But "The Importance of Being Earnest" is a real classic. There the author frankly goes for triviality, farce and brilliancy, and hits the bull's eye every time.

The English stage at the present moment is in an extraordinarily healthy condition, like a baby whose crowing, gurgling, and squalling is heard all over the house. Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones are still here, and their ranks are supplemented by Sir J. M. Barrie, Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Stanley Houghton, Som-

erset Maugham, and a host of others as promising as they are numerous.

In surveying the whole field of the drama from "Shakespeare to Shaw" one very significant fact strikes one very forcibly, and that is, that the drama, like the stage, has been continually trying to break through the artificial bonds that separated it from the rest of the world. It has now almost succeeded. Formerly, it was quite as much a thing apart as the stage was. No one seems to have thought of putting life on the stage as it actually was off it. The time and place of the plays was seldom "now" and "here". Shakespeare breathed life and Warwickshire into the old stories that he handled, but afterwards the movement was stopped and the drama sent to prison for a while. When it was released it was still heavily manacled. Goldsmith shook off some of the shackles, but Sheridan rather resumed them, and it was not till Tom Robertson's time that any very serious effort was made to get rid of them. But he did a great deal, Pinero continued the good work and Bernard Shaw and his followers have almost completed it. There is scarcely anything, nowadays, about which plays are not written, and about which they are not interesting. The drama is finding its place as the most vivid, fascinating, and living of all the arts. What it will do now that the world is waking up to realize what it can do, gives pleasant material for thought.

I said at the opening of this chapter that I made no apology for the intrusion of another book of dramatic criticisms or even an attempted criticism of Shakespeare. I make none now, but plead justification for the proceeding, lest it shall not sufficiently justify itself.

Some time ago I heard a lecturer on Shakespeare

advise his students and listeners to take up the study of Shakespeare and to *idolize* him. The mere mention of that little word had a most damaging effect on the whole lecture, for it seemed to illustrate exactly what was wrong with it. The lecturer idolized where he should have criticized, and turned Shakespeare into a sort of plaster-cast saint from another world, when he was really a wonder from this. The word criticism has gradually come to mean fault-finding, when it should really mean judging, separating, discerning. Now an idolater sees nothing but his idol, and is often so awed by its majesty that he is quite unable to discern its other beauties. A critic, on the other hand, is not awed by anything and so he sees many things. My advice to any student of Shakespeare would be—criticize, criticize, criticize, but *never* idolize anybody or anything. At the same time the essays in this book are not meant to be exhaustive critical studies, so much as bird's-eye views of the work of six leading dramatists. A friend once paid me the compliment of saying that after he had read something I had written, he felt he would like to read what it was written about. Should this little book have such an effect its main object would be achieved.

To make an exhaustive study of the English drama from Shakespeare to Shaw would need a whole library. This work is a sort of introduction to such a library. In compiling it the author has confined his consultations almost entirely to the published plays of the different authors, to the "Dictionary of National Biography," to the lives of Shakespeare, or the notes on his life by Aubrey, Sir Sidney Lee, Halliwell-Philipps, Fleay, C. F. Knight, and others. He has adopted the Dowden chronology of the Shakespeare plays which is now almost universally accepted, for, it appears to him, in-

ternal as well as external evidence points to that order as being the right one.

The author is also indebted to a useful little primer of the English drama by A. S. Rappoport, and to many other authorities, friends, and critics whose ideas he has not hesitated to steal when they seemed worth it.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

1564-1616.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, the supreme glory of English literature, and of the world's dramatic literature, was born at Stratford-on-Avon on 22 or 23 April, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, has been variously described as a butcher, a tanner, a glover, and a few other things. It seems probable that he had something to do with all of them, and that he kept a kind of general store. Whichever it was, he prospered exceedingly and rose to the dignity of an alderman, after which his prosperity declined, and he ended his days in debt and disgrace.

Shakespeare's mother's name was Mary Arden, daughter of Robert of that ilk, a well-to-do farmer of Wilmcote, in Warwickshire. Shakespeare and Arden were both very common and well-respected names in the midlands in those days.

Shakespeare's father moved from his native place, Snitterfield, to Stratford a little more than ten years before the poet was born. It would almost seem that that great "producer" Nature was quietly stage-managing the entrance of her brightest star. This is not put forward as a convincing argument against Baconism, but a more perfect scene for its first appearance than Stratford-on-Avon cannot be imagined. A typical, quiet, contemplative English country town, a broad,

deep, placid river winding its way steadily through the peaceful English countryside, resembling nothing more than the soul of the mighty poet born on its banks!

In 1571 Shakespeare seems to have attended the free grammar school at Stratford, at that time under the mastership of Walter Roche. His principal studies were English literature and Latin; and it is a proved fact that some of the books from which he afterwards borrowed or, to put it plainly, stole somewhat extensively, were then among his school books. Terence, Plautus and Ovid, were all afterwards laid under contribution. From Plautus came the "Comedy of Errors," and Ovid's "Metamorphoses" are said to have inspired his last and, in some ways, greatest play, "The Tempest". From Lily's grammar, "Sententiæ Pueriles," and other school-books of the period, Shakespeare in after life borrowed whole phrases, and there is an Aldine edition of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" in the Bodleian Library, said to be initialed by the poet's own hand.

But these glimpses into the classics—and glimpses are quite sufficient for an artist—were probably not the only outcome of the boy's school-days. In July, 1575, Queen Elizabeth paid the famous visit to Lord Leicester at Kenilworth Castle, and there took place the wonderful series of pageants and masques immortalized by Scott in "Kenilworth". It is possible they had their share in immortalizing Shakespeare; for it seems scarcely conceivable that such a boy would have missed such sights. Perhaps it was this "Midsummer Night's Dream" that afterwards begot the other! Perhaps Shakespeare heard of the festivities and could not see them! His father's embarrassed circumstances at that time could not have encouraged merrymaking. So possibly the whole thing *was* a Midsummer Night's

Dream to him, and we can imagine the small, eager-faced boy listening to his more fortunate companions' accounts of the adventures, and the busy little brain taking an indelible impression, afterwards to be developed.

Shakespeare's school time came early to an end. In 1577 he left school, and took his share in the family business, now rapidly declining. The father's fortunes are said to have narrowed down to a single line of business, and the young Master William became a butcher's boy, in common with Cardinal Wolsey and other giants.

Aubrey, his earliest and contemporary biographer, says that when he killed a calf he "would doe it in high style and make a speech". Moreover he had a rival in the town, another butcher's boy, who, however, died young. It is scarcely to be wondered at! Two Shakespeares in Stratford would have been too much of a good thing. Of course, Aubrey's story is somewhat apocryphal, but it is also contemporaneous, and if Shakespeare ever did kill a calf, it is not impossible that he made a speech about it.

The next important step in his life was his marriage, which took place before he was nineteen years old, to Anne Hathaway, daughter of one Richard Hathaway of Shottery, near Stratford.

Shakespeare's wife, who was eight years his senior, brought him the modest dowry of £6 13s. 4d., bequeathed to her by her father, then recently deceased. His will is still among the archives of Somerset House. Descendants of the Hathaway family lived in what is now known as Anne Hathaway's cottage until as recently as 1838. Whilst there are no traces to be found at Stratford or anywhere else of a registry of the mar-

riage, there exists in the registry of the diocese a deed, in which two trusty "husbandmen of Stratford," named Sandells and Richardson, go bail to the extent of £40, to free the Bishop of all liability should any "lawful impediment" be found to exist as to why William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway should not be bound together in Holy Matrimony.

Such documents as these are not uncommon, but it is a curious fact that there is no mention of his parents. It was usually the custom for the bridegroom himself and his father to go bail on these occasions. It would almost seem that Shakespeare married without the consent of his parents, which is highly probable, considering the state of their finances at the time. Moreover, there were other urgent reasons why the ceremony should be proceeded with, for within six months after signing this deed, a daughter, afterwards called Susannah, was born to Mrs. William Shakespeare. Nearly three years later, in 1585, two more children arrived, a son Hamnet, and a daughter Judith. One wonders, in the light of after events, whether Hamlet was really Hamnet, or Hamnet, Hamlet! Domestic bliss seems not to have been the poet's lot,—which is scarcely to be wondered at, considering the hazardous nature of his experiment. There was too much in common between them before the marriage, and too little after it. "Sour-eyed disdain and barren hate" lodged with the couple; and soon after the birth of his twin children the poet seems to have left his hearth and home, and made his way to the Metropolis. The famous poaching affray at Charlecote Park is said to have been the cause of his departure; but it is more probable that it was the excuse for it.

Sir Thomas Lucy is said to have had Shakespeare

whipped and sent to prison, and the poet's revenge consisted in a lampoon pinned to the gates of Charlecote Park, a version of which has survived; but it is scarcely possible to believe that it is by William Shakespeare. This, however, was only a small part of the Shakespearean revenge. Sir Thomas Lucy has been immortalized for all time as Justice Shallow; and whether the portrait be a faithful one or not, it is as fixed in the mind and opinion of posterity as a star in the heavens!

It seems probable that Shakespeare, when fleeing beyond the reach of Lucy's jurisdiction, and possibly of Mrs. Shakespeare's tongue, did not immediately proceed to London; and there is a tradition that he became a schoolmaster in some neighbouring town. Whether this be true or not, it seems tolerably certain that he arrived in London in 1586, probably travelling on foot viâ Oxford, where he is said to have rested at the Crown Inn, in the Corn Market.

In London he had a friend, one Field from Stratford, who was apprenticed to a printer, Thomas Vautrollier. Field afterwards became publisher of some of Shakespeare's plays and poems; and the known association of these two is a very important contribution to the scanty material of the poet's life. There is documentary evidence that both Shakespeare and Field were made free of the Stationers' Company in 1587.

Shakespeare had not been long in London before he found employment at a theatre, *the* theatre, in fact—the only other one was called "The Curtain"!—kept by James Burbage, whose son Richard afterwards became the most famous actor of his day, and a crony of Shakespeare's. Both the theatres were in Shoreditch: The Theatre near Finsbury Fields, The Curtain in Moor-

fields. Various legends have been in circulation of the poet's humble beginnings. At one time we hear of his holding horses' heads outside the theatre, at another, of his being call-boy. Both are possibilities, if not probabilities. Folk who get to the top of the theatrical tree have generally begun at the bottom. However, they do not stop there long; nor, it appears, did Shakespeare.

It was necessary in those days for actors to procure a licence to pursue their calling from the Lord Chamberlain, or some great noble of their acquaintance. They were rogues and vagabonds without this, and with it, too, sometimes!

The company which Shakespeare joined and with which he was to be associated for practically the rest of his life, was at first known as the Earl of Leicester's company, afterwards Lord Derby's, then the Chamberlain's, from Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain, who was its patron, until it was finally promoted by King James, and known as The King's Players. Its principal tragic actor was Richard Burbage, of whom mention has already been made. Burbage was the greatest tragedian of the day, and probably one of the greatest of all time. "Hamlet" especially is said to have been written round him. He was short and fat and scant of breath. There are those who maintain that the fact that "Hamlet" was written for Burbage accounts for the great difficulty in getting an adequate portrayal of the character. Until we get a reproduction or reincarnation (!) or something of that personality, with, incidentally, the mind of Shakespeare in addition, we shall not get another Hamlet. Three other members of the company, Henry Condell, John Heming, and Augustine Phillips, were bosom friends of the poet.

From now on till 1594 Shakespeare seems to have found plenty of employment as a play-doctor, a "toucher-up," to parody his own words, "of ill-considered trifles". He probably began as devil to Robert Wilson. "Love's Labour's Lost," said to be his first play, "The Comedy of Errors," "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," the first, second and third parts of Henry VI, all began as adaptations. "Romeo and Juliet," which seems to have been written about 1591, was the first play to give a real hint of the poet's matchless powers. But it is carefully written, and the author seems to have been feeling his way and to be trammelled by the restrictions of correct versification, and not yet to have reached the point, gained by all great geniuses, where all canons and laws can be safely set aside. "Love's Labour's Lost" is remarkable in being, as far as can be ascertained, not only Shakespeare's first play, but the only one in which the plot was his own invention and was not borrowed. As a plot, it is somewhat thin; but the play already gives signs of that wonderfully assimilative and observant mind. It is almost a running commentary upon peoples and persons, politics and places, "an abstract and brief chronicle of the times," coloured by and laid in the scene of the civil war that was then raging in France.

"The Two Gentlemen of Verona" was evidently an adaptation, says Sir Sidney Lee, of a "History of Felix and Philomena," an extinct play that had been acted at Court in 1584. It is remarkable for further glimpses of a wonderful poet, for many curious little examples of that poet's amiable little weakness for puns, quips, cranks, and quibbles, and, above all, for the introduction of Launce and his dog, and Speed, the first and in some ways the happiest of Shakespeare's immortal "clowns".

The speech of Launce to his dog is delicious and almost pathetic in its whimsical, though somewhat homely humour.

"The Two Gentlemen" was first published in the Folio of 1623, after much revision, as was also "The Comedy of Errors," almost the only incursion of Shakespeare into what might be called pure farce, if we except "The Merry Wives of Windsor". After these three plays came "Romeo and Juliet," with its accomplishment of something very great and hints of something still greater. Then came the first part of Henry VI, an undoubted adaptation. It seems to have been shortly followed by the production of the two other parts. It was first played on 3 March, 1592, at the Rose Theatre by Lord Strange's men. It was very successful, and caused serious misgivings amongst the established dramatists of the day. One of them, Robert Greene, sang on his deathbed a swan song of bitter jealousy and rancour.

This event is of importance, in that it helps to form a link in the strong and long chain of evidence that Shakespeare really was the author, or perhaps one should say adapter, of Shakespeare's plays!

There is some evidence that Marlowe was among Shakespeare's collaborators in the Henry VI trilogy. To Marlowe, Shakespeare owed more than to any other writer, but his debt to him and to the many other writers to whom he was indebted is as nothing to their debt to him.

Henry VI seems to have been followed by Shakespeare's first great single-handed historical tragedy, Richard III. It was almost a continuation of Henry VI, owed much to Marlowe's influence, yet improved upon him; for there is a sober reserve and artistic sense

of proportion, not always noticeable in Marlowe's fiery work. Moreover there is, perhaps, a greater sense, or greater grasp of character from the actor's, as well as the author's point of view, in the portrayal of Richard III. Burbage was the fortunate actor who first had the opportunity to "create" this magnificent acting character. And he made good use of it. Richard III was followed by Richard II—if less theatrically effective, perhaps still greater as a work of art, and certainly far deeper as a tragedy pure and simple. Richard III is the tragedy of villainy; Richard II, of a weak character and good intention. "Titus Andronicus" was the next important play. It was attributed to Shakespeare in his own lifetime, but has since, with some authority, been regarded as the work of an unknown author, pulled together with a few masterly touches by the master's hand. Kyd, of "The Spanish Tragedy," is by some thought to be its author.

The next play from Shakespeare's hand was one of the most popular he ever wrote, as well as one of the most artistically beautiful in every sense of the word. "The Merchant of Venice" is said to have been based upon the material contained in a fourteenth century collection of Italian stories by Giovanni Fiorentino and a popular mediæval collection of anecdotes called "Gesta Romanorum".

But these things seem only to have been accessible to Shakespeare in the Italian itself, whilst there is good evidence that the stories of the pound of flesh and the caskets had been previously used in more than one play, to the manuscript of which Shakespeare had access. Moreover, Shakespeare with the unerring instinct, watchfulness, and wakefulness of the great and practical genius, chose the time when popular interest was

centred in the persecution of a Jew, Roderigo Lopez, the Queen's physician, whose trial and execution took place in the early and middle part of 1594.

The next important play was "King John," also written in 1594, and adapted from an old play on the subject, with the usual result that the foundations of the house have long since subsided under the weighty mass of grandeur that has risen on the top of them.

In December, 1594, "The Comedy of Errors" was performed in Gray's Inn, before an audience of the benchers of the inn, students and their friends, and so on. Owing to some cause that had nothing whatever to do with the play, there was an uproar, and nearly a riot; and when, shortly afterwards, the occurrence was inquired into, the committee of inquiry attributed it to a sorcerer having "foisted a company of base and common fellows to make up our disorders with a play of errors and confusions". But the said sorcerer, who was indeed a mighty magician, was probably not in the house, as he was playing before the Queen at Greenwich on that day. "King John" was followed by four plays, "Arden of Faversham," "Edward III," "Mucedorus," and "Fair Em," all of which have been partially or wholly, but in all probability quite erroneously, attributed to Shakespeare.

These years, 1593 and 1594, saw not only the production of the plays already mentioned, but also of the poems. The first of them, "Venus and Adonis," was published in the spring of 1593 by Shakespeare's old Stratford friend, Richard Field, and was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and alluded to by Shakespeare as "the first heir of my invention". This is held to prove that Shakespeare wrote, or at least drafted it, before any of his dramatic work. Or perhaps

he did not regard his dramatic work, which was, after all, mainly adaptation, as invention. "Venus and Adonis" was followed the next year by a poem published under the title of "Lucrece," and now known as "The Rape of Lucrece". Both these poems are founded upon books that must have been easily accessible to Shakespeare. Lodge's "Scillæ's Metamorphosis," which appeared in 1589, and which relates the story in the same metre and spirit, and Chaucer's "Legend of Good Women," which retells the story of Lucrece.

This poem was also dedicated to Lord Southampton, in a dedication which marked a closer degree of intimacy and more warmth of friendship. "What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours."

The poems were an instantaneous success, and Shakespeare, who had already a great and growing reputation among his friends, heard his name on every lip and his praises sung by the greatest poets of the day, including Edmund Spenser and Michael Drayton.

The poems were shortly followed by the sonnets, amounting in number to 154, mainly addressed to a young patron, who from external as well as internal evidence seems to have been the youthful and beautiful Earl of Southampton. The sonnets are of absorbing interest, not only on account of their merit and beauty—some of them are the most exquisite that have ever been penned—but of the wonderful insight they seem to give us both into the character of their author and into some curious happenings in his own life. A mysterious dark lady figures in them, and a beautiful youth, both of whom have touched the author's heart. At the same time, it is scarcely safe to assume that the sonneteer is always referring to events that have actually happened

to himself, or others. As in his plays, so in his sonnets, Shakespeare draws upon fact and fancy, embellishes fact till it becomes fancy, and fancy till it becomes fact, borrows everywhere, improves everywhere, juggles with words and verbal conceits, descends from the sublime to the ridiculous, and ascends from the ridiculous to the sublime. It is evident that the great poet was caught in the long wave of sonneteering that had come over from France and Italy, and emulating Sir Philip Sidney and his friends, as usual, excelled them all. But, fortunately for humanity, he only rode the crest of this wave; he was not engulfed and drowned in it, as some were; and we soon find him steadily at work again on his plays, or, to be exact, on other people's plays!

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" was probably the first play that followed the sonnets, and its first production is assigned to the winter of 1595. It was probably written to celebrate a marriage, more than one occurring at this time of sufficient applicability and importance to a dramatist and poet. The one which we would fain believe inspired the master-poet was that of Lucy Harrington, the patroness of all poets, to Edmund Russell, third Earl of Bedford. It took place on 12 December, 1594. And the play contains graceful and courtier-like, and not altogether unbusiness-like—Shakespeare sometimes had an eye to the main chance—references to the Virgin Queen as a "Fair Vestal thronèd by the West," and the "imperial votaress who passed on, in maiden meditation, fancy-free"! One hopes that the Virgin Queen appreciated the exquisite compliment of her poet-player, laden with the music of real poetry and idyllic chivalry, at least as much as she did the empty flattery of the false favourite who, with his

masques, may have planted in the poet's mind the seedling that afterwards became "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Ideas for the play were drawn from the usual sources, Plutarch, Ovid, Chaucer; but in the main it is Shakespeare's own, and marks his first incursion into fairyland. It may sound sacrilege to say so—but one sometimes wishes that he had gone there alone, and not taken with him his mortals.

The clowning element in the "Dream" is of course funny, and handled in Shakespeare's own matchless way; but somehow it loses rather than gains by the contrast with the fairy element. The dramatic value of contrast is not great. The fantasy, fancy, and witchery, the exquisite sense of poetry, general spriteliness and gossamer lightness of the poet's touch, like the touch of a fairy's wing, have never been and never will be excelled. They are perfect.

Shakespeare seems to have been a kind of medium, reflecting every phase of human nature. Indeed, it sometimes seems almost as though he himself were occasionally handled, in his turn, by the passions, fears, and doubts of human nature, by "all the ills that flesh is heir to"; which he knew so wonderfully well how to portray, just as an actor may sometimes be governed by his part, only no great actor ever was wholly so governed. But to a certain extent it is so, and seems to have been so with Shakespeare, if the conjectural evidence of the chronological order of his writings be correct. From the fairy heights of the immortal fantasy of "The Dream" he descended to the gloomy, murky, mortal comedy of "All's Well that Ends Well".

The plot is said to be drawn from Paynter's "Palace of Pleasure," Paynter, in his turn having got it from

Boccaccio's "Decameron". Pathos is the predominant note of the comedy, which is really a tragedy. Helena, despised and rejected of men, is one of the greatest and gentlest of Shakespeare's great and gentle heroines. Throughout the play the female element is in the ascendant, as it is in so many of Shakespeare's plays—true student of feminine nature that he was! One wonders that the old Countess of Rousillon should have such a son as Bertram, and Helena countenance such a lover. But the ladies did not have it all their own way, and "All's Well" was followed shortly by "The Taming of the Shrew," first published in 1594, in which the induction and the actual taming of Catherine by Petruchio had made their first appearance; but the sub-plot of Bianca and her lovers was added, said to be drawn from the "Supposes" of George Gascoigne, adapted from Ariosto's comedy, "I Suppositi". Certain facts indicate that this scene was the work of a coadjutor. Apart from its interest as a rattling, rollicking farce, the play is especially interesting as providing in its induction more evidence of the author's acquaintance with Stratford-on-Avon and its neighbourhood. The priceless pearls that fall from the lips of the disgusting old Christopher Sly are his descriptions of Burton Heath, which has been identified with Barton-on-the-Heath, entered in Doomsday Book as Bertone, doubtless pronounced Burton by the ill-educated of Shakespeare's day, as Derby and Berkshire are mispronounced to-day; also of Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot. Wincots, Wilnecots, and Wilmcotes abound in the neighbourhood of Stratford. On 2 November, 1591, the Sara Hacket daughter of Robert Hacket was baptized in Quinton Church, and Wincot was part of the parish of Quinton. Sly, or Slie, was a fairly common name in Warwick-

shire, as indeed it was all over the country in those days. Others among the names of his cronies mentioned by Sly have been identified with real names in Stratford at that time, and these items of local interest abound still more in his next plays, the first and second parts of "Henry IV".

Justice Shallow with the luces in his coat of arms is, of course, identified with Sir Thomas Lucy, Shakespeare's old enemy. And it is a curious and interesting fact that these plays were apparently written and produced just at about the time when the poet, driven to his home by stress of domestic circumstances, had renewed his acquaintance with Stratford and its neighbourhood.

But "Henry IV" is of especial interest, not merely on account of its references to Shakespeare's own birthplace, but also in that it is the birth-place of Jack Falstaff. The greatest comic character in all literature—some would not even qualify the statement with the word comic—Sir John is said to have had his prototype, one Sir John Oldcastle, a gentleman who figured in the play upon which "Henry IV" was founded. Falstaff was thought to be a development of Oldcastle, and the Oldcastles, or their belongings, took offence. Nor is it surprising, for the original was a most worthy Christian knight, a gentleman and a martyr. Falstaff was no martyr, unless, indeed, to the gout, dyspepsia, and the thousand and one ills such a mountain of flesh is heir to. Shakespeare, in a later epilogue, announces explicitly that "Oldcastle was not the man," but Oldcastle owes his immortality to him all the same, for that pious worthy would have been dead, buried, and forgotten years ago but for the naughty Falstaff. No one but a Shakespeare could have conceived this mighty creation.

Only a mind capable of the broadest, kindest humanity could have endowed this loathsome mass with the sympathy we all have for Falstaff, and the charm and attraction he has for all of us. The secret of Falstaff seems almost to be his utter absence of self-consciousness, his honesty with himself. To his own self he is most certainly true, and in that he deceives nobody, and is false to nobody. Somehow, one is not surprised that his end was peaceful, and he "babbled o' green fields," and spoke of none of those things his lewd friends expected him to. There is nothing mean about Falstaff, only vain. Stabbing a dead man in the thigh shocks one's superstitious susceptibilities, but Falstaff had much to gain thereby, or thought he had, and Hotspur had nothing to lose! To give him his due, Falstaff lived his life to the full in this world; he knew the inside and the outside of it, and was quite ready to pass on to the next. Doubtless he will get all there is to be got out of it. Let us hope he is happy in his green fields!

From the very first Falstaff was a success. He was recognized at once as one of the greatest creations in literature. There is good foundation for the truth of the story that Queen Elizabeth was so delighted with him that she commanded the author to introduce him into another play. The result was "The Merry Wives of Windsor," written, it was said, in fourteen days. It certainly looks as if it were! The Queen is said to have been very well pleased with the production. Whether the author was is not known. Perhaps he feared more such "commands," and for that reason killed Sir John in his next play, "Henry V," which was produced at the Globe early in 1599.

The wild youth Prince Hal has, as Henry V, grown into a splendid specimen of a sovereign-soldier. Death

has removed him from the baneful and bellyful influence of Falstaff, the pathetic description of whose death is a touch of supreme genius and insight. The shadow of his death is cast over the play; for whilst there is plenty of comic incident, it is, to say the least of it, thin stuff after Falstaff. And the typical Welshman, Scotchman, and Irishman substituted for this truly English specimen do not by any means compensate for him. Patriotism, and somewhat blatant patriotism at that, is the keynote to "Henry V," which reflects in a remarkable manner Shakespeare's curiously journalistic alertness and wide-awake attitude toward his times.

Indeed he was a little bit too much on the spot. For he hints, in the prologue to Act V, at an enthusiastic reception at the hands of the people of London, to be given to the Earl of Essex on his return from "broaching the rebellion in Ireland".

But unfortunately Essex was not successful, and on his return was practically attainted of treason, and then tried to stir up the Londoners to a rebellion in his favour. He was a great friend of Southampton's, Shakespeare's patron. And Shakespeare was now becoming a big man in the Metropolis, and with his connivance Richard II was revived at the Globe, on the day before that fixed for the rising.

As a result of all this, Essex was executed, Southampton imprisoned, and Shakespeare added a little worldly wisdom to his world wisdom, and never again permitted himself to be drawn into any public reference to the fates of either Southampton or Essex.

"Henry V" may be said aptly to mark the conclusion of the first or historical period of Shakespeare's career as a dramatist. It is the last of the historical series, unless, indeed, we except Henry VIII, of which he was

only part author. He had now attained a very prominent position, was obviously a person of importance and power in public life. The first period of his life had closed full of happy augury and brilliant promise. In that secure and enviable position we will leave him for the nonce, and retrace our steps a little way, briefly to examine what is known about his private life.

In the year 1596 Shakespeare seems to have returned to Stratford-on-Avon, and to have resumed relations with his family which had been broken off eleven years previously.

What, exactly, woke his conscience in this direction is not known. Possibly it was the serious illness of his only son Hamnet; for that young gentleman died at the age of eleven and a half, and was buried in the parish church on 11 August, 1596.

The prodigal's return was welcome, and the fatted calf was killed, though by the son, not the father. John Shakespeare had fallen on evil days, and was much harassed, persecuted, and prosecuted by creditors. On the son's arrival these prosecutions, and doubtless the persecutions, suddenly ceased. And the next we hear of the family is that John Shakespeare is applying at the Heralds' College for the grant of a coat-of-arms. And he got it. People generally do! It is probable, moreover, that his son was the prime mover in this course; for then, as now, the application for a grant of arms had to be made by the eldest representative of the applying family. But there were one or two little hitches at the outset, as the Shakespeares asked for too much, wishing to impale the coat with the arms of the Ardens of Park Hall, Warwickshire, alleging that they were Mrs. Shakespeare senior's family. But it was felt that the humble status of the Ardens of Wilmcote might

cause the Park Hallites to protest; and so they were given permission to impale the arms of a family of the same name, with whom they had no connexion whatever, but who lived conveniently far away. However, the Shakespeares finally moderated their demands, and contented themselves with their own simple shield. One of the points that render these transactions of peculiar interest is the fact that the grant of arms was not completed until three years after the first application, at the time when the Earl of Essex had become head of the Heralds' College and Earl Marshal, and William Camden Clarenceux King-of-Arms. Both these gentlemen were personal friends of the poet, and on intimate terms with his patron, the Earl of Southampton.

Shakespeare now began to carry out what we may presume had for some time been a cherished ambition, namely to settle down as a country gentleman in his native town of Stratford-on-Avon. His plays and his share in the Globe Theatre, the latter especially, brought him in what was, for those times, the very considerable income of something over a hundred pounds a year, equal in our time to something over a thousand. He purchased New Place, the largest house in the town, from one William Underhill, who died before the bargain was completed. It was a fine old house, built a hundred years before by Sir Hugh Clopton, and had fallen somewhat into rack and ruin. For it Shakespeare paid the then substantial sum of £60, but the bargain was not completed until 1602, the date of the coming of age of the vendor's second son, his first having come to an untimely end on the gallows.

The repair of this house and the formation of a garden and orchard seem to have been very popular hobbies with the poet. All the world knows of the

famous mulberry tree, said to have been planted with his own hands, which was cut down by the vandalistic owner in 1758, relics of which are second only in quantity and quality to those of the true cross.

Henceforward the poet lived a great part of every year at Stratford-on-Avon. He not only bought New Place, but a good deal of property round about, as is testified to by the deeds and conveyances that are still in existence. He appears to have looked with an envious eye upon any of the properties formerly connected with his own or his mother's family, and sentimental values seem to have appealed to him quite as much as practical.

Much mystery has been made of the source and possibilities of Shakespeare's worldly wealth at this time, but it can all be quite reasonably accounted for. The profession of a successful actor was a very paying one even in those days, and Shakespeare's wealth was nothing more wonderful than that of some of his companions at that time was known to have been. This is especially true of Edward Alleyne, whose substantial benefices at Dulwich are still in existence. It is doubtful if any other actor, even in modern times, has left behind him such a fortune.

One result of all Shakespeare's purchases was that he found himself involved in a great deal of litigation, a thing to which he was by no means averse, and toward which he seems to have had a hereditary leaning.

This fact is interesting as it helps, perhaps, to explain Shakespeare's exceptional knowledge of law. It would not do to say that it *explains* the extraordinary, comprehensive, and almost universal knowledge of law and its operations that appears in the plays; but it is

an indication that the poet's fancy ran in that direction, and when a mind like Shakespeare's takes a fancy to anything the results may be surprising.

If material possessions were giving Shakespeare an important position in his native town, mental riches were doing the same by him in the Metropolis.

We begin to find eulogistic mention of him in contemporary records. Sir Sidney Lee, as the result of his masterly and exhaustive researches into the English literature of the time, mentions as the two most significant—"Palladis Tamia," by Francis Meres, a book in which the author, in a general survey of contemporary English literature, awards first place to Shakespeare, and "Poems in Divers Humours," by Richard Barnefield, who prophesies the immortality of Shakespeare in the following words, whose principal beauty is their truth :—

. . . . . .

Thy name in Fame's immortal Book have placed.
Live ever you, at least in fame live ever.
Well may the body die, but fame dies never.

But perhaps the most significant tributes to and of "public opinion" were the many worthless plays and poems which were from 1595 onwards for many years —indeed centuries—after his death, published under the magic name or initials of Shakespeare.

Of the plays thus falsely attributed, "The Merry Devill of Edmonton" was by far the best and possessed most claims to be authentic. It was a rollicking farce, not without some resemblance to "The Merry Wives of Windsor". It was first published anonymously in 1608, but in 1662 was published by Francis Kirkman as being by William Shakespeare and William Rowley. But Rowley seems to have been somewhat of a dis-

covery of Kirkman's, who perhaps hit upon this admirable method of justifying his find!

Poems as well as plays were attributed to "W. S." "The Passionate Pilgrim" and "The Phoenix and the Turtle" were perhaps the most plausible.

The first, an anthology, was published in 1599 by one William Jaggard, a Paul Jones among piratical publishers, and the second appeared in the appendix to "Love's Martyr," by Robert Chester.[1]

The appendix was certainly the best part of this book, and it numbered among its contributors Ben Jonson and Chapman as well as Shakespeare, and was advertised as having been "done by the best and chiefest of our modern writers," for all the world like the first number of a modern magazine of fiction.

It would certainly seem that with his increasing worldly prosperity and comfort, Shakespeare's mind was proportionately lightened; for it would appear to have been at about this time that he wrote what are perhaps the three most perfect comedies that have ever been penned—"Much Ado about Nothing," "As You Like It," and "Twelfth Night". Add to these the fairy comedy of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and the great comedy-drama "The Merchant of Venice," and the group, quite apart from the great tragedies, earns for their author a supreme place in literature. If woman is at the bottom of all the tragedy of life, so is she with respect to the comedy. She is generally the moving spirit of Shakespeare's comedies.

The three plays mark three distinct types of comedy. In "Much Ado" the comedy, as seen through the eyes of a gentle, kindly tolerant cynic, of a comely couple who quite honestly consider themselves somewhat

[1] *Cf.* Sir Sidney Lee, "Life of Shakespeare," pp. 90, 91.

superior to the pitfalls that entrap the ordinary human being—and of course fall into a trap that would be obvious to anyone whose nose was not *very* high in the air — is the comedy of self-deception—unconscious comedy. Benedict and Beatrice are in a sense quite as unconsciously humorous as Dogberry and Verges.

The subsidiary plot of the play, the slandering of Hero, is a very ugly business and casts a bar-sinister across a delightful comedy ; yet there seems nothing inartistic about it ; it is no excrescence, but only reminds one that the play is human after all.

" As You Like It," as its name implies, is a go-as-you-please comedy. Nevertheless the order of its construction and its completion as a work of art would satisfy Aristotle.

Here the heroine is the comedian, or rather the *comédienne.* Rosalind is practically " in the know " all the time. There is very little this most knowing young lady does not know. She knows, but most young ladies would, when Orlando loves her, but what is more wonderful, she knows when she is in love with him, and, it seems, never attempts to deceive herself to the contrary. She is really the *dea ex machinâ* of the play. It is quite right and proper, although out of the fashion, that she should speak the epilogue. But Rosalind would never be in the fashion, at least she would never be conventional. Did she live in these days she would probably be a militant suffragette, if only for the fun of the thing. Beatrice, on the other hand, I feel might be strictly constitutional.

But Rosalind is perfect. She is the life and soul of the Forest of Arden, and even mortals have to behave themselves in her presence. No ugly secondary plot intrudes itself into the sylvan witcheries of " As You

Like It". Even the wicked duke is converted on the outskirts of the fairyland, ere he is fit to enter, and the melancholy Jacques is continually finding things that surprise and interest him out of himself. "A fool, a motley fool who railed at Lady Fortune in good set terms," as if anybody but he whom the world calls a fool would dare do aught but cajole the lady! Jacques finds being melancholy no easy task in the Forest of Arden. It is small wonder that within its depths Shakespeare is stirred to such exquisite music of poetry and of prose, and to gems of song which enhance even their setting. Three hours in the Forest of Arden with Will Shakespeare is as good as a year's outing in the real country for the tired workers of a great city. Such a treat the present writer once had. The performance was given by the Sothern-Marlowe company from America. Higher praise there cannot be than to say that the production, *as a whole*, was satisfying. In parts there may have been things that were not right, anachronisms, modernisms, Americanisms; but the main result of the whole performance was to project across the footlights the witchery, the charm, the lightness, the sanity, what may almost be called the intense *reality* of Shakespeare's imagination.

After "As You Like It," "Twelfth Night," Shakespeare's next comedy, is rather a blow. Not in any artistic sense, for as a work of art it is, like its predecessor, perfect; but the whole comedy is cast in a coarser, crueller, more cynical mould. Few things are more cruel than a pitiless exposure of vanity. Malvolio, the butt of the comedy, is at least as estimable as he is vain. Shakespeare draws him with his own kindly, tolerant touch. He lets us see his good points as well as his bad ones, exposing or perhaps

exhibiting his frail mortal with gentleness, touching in his picture on all points, good, bad, and indifferent, with the inexpressible tenderness and truth of one who loves his fellow-men even more than his matchless art. Doubtless he would have liked to let Malvolio off more easily; but, true to his own canon, he held the mirror up to nature, and the wretched Malvolio has to pay to the uttermost farthing and more; for a pretty set of usurers in envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness exact the penalty. Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Maria are indeed suited for the dirty work they have to do. In the choice of his tools as in everything else, Shakespeare was a master craftsman.

As with the "Merchant of Venice," what was probably meant to be a subsidiary *motif* has really become the main interest of the play. It may fairly be assumed that Shakespeare set out to write the love comedies of Orsino, Sebastian, Viola, and Olivia as he did that of Portia and Bassanio. Shakespeare apparently did not consider love the most important of human passions, dramatically, at any rate. It is often treated by him as a fleeting, butterfly business, a pleasant, or at times unpleasant, dream; an illusion, and a most useful one, flitting about like a pretty butterfly from one person to the other, and generally settling in the most convenient places for the dramatist.

Wiseacres of the present day say there is only one plot, the eternal triangle, a plot which the greatest dramatist of all time seldom uses.

In the three plays where the love interest is the strongest interest, "Antony and Cleopatra," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Othello," love is the catastrophe. In the deathless dramas of "Hamlet," "Lear," "Mac-

beth," "Cæsar," "Richard III," it plays practically no part.

Love, Shakespeare seems to say, is not, or should not be, a grand passion, but a gentle, kindly, benevolent influence, that does little harm and a little good. It did Benedick and Beatrice a lot of good, more than they realized at the time, and must have been a blessing to their friends. Their superiority could not survive it.

Shakespeare knew well the difference between passion and love. Passion of any sort is generally the moving spirit of tragedy; love, of comedy. He puts his foot through many a popular fallacy on the subject of love besides that which deems it the only thing that is interesting. He does not belittle love, but puts it in its proper place, alongside of art, as one of the things that make life worth living. To put either of them on a pedestal, as the be-all and end-all of everything, is indeed to belittle it, for neither of them is completely satisfying. The lover may want a little art, the artist a little love.

"Twelfth Night" appears to have been the last of Shakespeare's irresponsible comedies. Henceforward his genius was, as Sir Sidney Lee comprehensively puts it, "to move without faltering on Titanic heights". The highest, deepest, most profound themes of tragedy were to occupy his mind. Such comedy as there was, was to be in the nature of "comic relief," or the pathetic, romantic, gentle comedy that characterizes the last three plays.

The first intimation of the new line was the noble tragedy of "Julius Cæsar," which was first produced in 1601. It was a theme upon which Shakespeare's mind may have been dwelling for some time. For his own company had previously acted plays on the subject,

which is one that could not fail to stir the heart of any tragic writer.

The plot and principal characters of the tragedy, which is conceived upon the highest and noblest plane, are all obviously drawn from Plutarch's "Lives". The theme is envy. Envy at its worst and wickedest. Envy and malice employing an innocent dupe to do their dirty work. All the principal characters are men. The feminine interest is only domestic and quite outside the plot, as perhaps it was in Rome in those times. Had Brutus regarded Portia as something more than his plaything, he might have taken her into his confidence, and her gentle hands have averted the catastrophe. For she is a gentle creature, beautifully and tenderly drawn by Shakespeare, as is also her pendant Calpurnia. But Calpurnia, although not half the woman Portia is, is more successful with her husband, and nearly dissuades him from paying the fatal visit to the Capitol. He is finally a victim to an enemy who seems too much for almost all human nature, the fear of ridicule.

As a personality, Julius Cæsar does not loom large in the play. Actors consider him a poor part. He is drawn in the moment of defeat, or rather decline, almost in his dotage. And a wavering attitude strikes the first note of the tragedy. But the spirit of Cæsar pervades the whole play, and is the indirect cause of the tragedy. The conspirators are not, on the whole, mean, small, or bad men. Brutus, the dupe, is a really fine man, described by Mark Antony as the noblest Roman of them all! And Mark Antony implies thereby that the others too were not without nobility. But Cassius is a poor creature. One can somehow understand his looking lean and hungry. He seems to be starved in more than the mere physical sense of the word. He has always

a grievance, he grumbles. True, he has something to grumble at, men of his type usually have. But the conspirators, one and all, seem to be acting below themselves, to be caught in the toils of something outside of themselves, and practically with their own hands they perform the act of expiation for their crimes. With Brutus' death on the plains of Philippi the tragedy ends. A tragedy that begins with the death, in civilization's capital, of one of the greatest men of all time, and culminates with that of a comparatively private individual in a retired corner of a battlefield. Yet there is no anti-climax; the tragic interest increases as the play progresses. For Shakespeare, with his unerring instinct, sees where the real tragedy lies—not in the death of Cæsar, who though not an old man, had perhaps completed his life's work, and done it so well that the future could do without him, but in the blighting of a young, hopeful, promising life.

The tragedy of Julius Cæsar, as written by Shakespeare, is the tragedy of Brutus. The construction of the play, tapering from a broad base, through a wonderful sequence of scenes, to a point, the point of Brutus' sword, is perfect. The opening triumph, then the pathetic vestibule to the tragedy in the Capitol, the tragedy itself, so terrible that it is not at first seen in all its significance; its utter futility, which begins to become apparent in the forum scene, and the splendid scene where great Cæsar's will is announced; then the gradual deepening of the shadows, the pathetic, petty quarrel between Brutus and Cassius; the sadness and desolation of Portia's death, the fateful apparition of Cæsar's ghost, and, finally, the almost unreproducible scenes of the deaths of Cassius and Brutus, in secluded corners of a raging battlefield: all these things are mar-

vellous, above criticism, in the highest realms of art, but perhaps the crowning miracle of the play is the wonderful reality and artistic completeness of the illusion, the atmosphere that Shakespeare creates. One feels that it must be the true atmosphere of old Rome. There is a convincing mixture of nobility and smallness, almost pettiness—of sanity and superstition. The old Roman was nothing if he was not good form. There were certain things which he would not do, not because they were wrong, but because they were not done. He had his own ideas of right and wrong; and it is not surprising that he sometimes did not know whether he was on his head or his heels, and found himself let in for such things as the murder of Cæsar. But whatever he did, he did it with dignity. He had his signs and his portents, as all the superstitious have, and much good did they bring him! Lionesses might whelp in the streets, comets might invade the sky, but no one did more than wag his tongue to save a great man's life.

Well might Mark Antony say with fine irony, "So are they all, all honourable men". And so doubtless they were, according to their lights—but, what a flickering light! If it was Halley's comet, as some aver, it must have given as feeble a display as it did in London two years ago.

And there are those who think that all these lights and shades, heights and depths, depicted so wonderfully in this play, must have been written by a scholar and learned from books. As if all the books that were ever written before or since that day could contain the half of them! Be that the sort of learning necessary to this kind of work, then there is only one person who can possibly have had the necessary knowledge, genius and experience, and that person is Julius Cæsar himself.

The success of "Julius Cæsar" roused the ire and jealousy of Shakespeare's redoubtable contemporary, "Rare Ben Jonson," challenged and defeated on his own ground by a man whom he had pronounced as having little Latin and less Greek. So annoyed was he at Shakespeare's success, that he allied himself with the Children of the Chapel, choristers of the Chapel Royal, who were now giving performances at the Blackfriars Theatre, drawing all the town, and doing temporarily as much harm to the old-established actors as was done by one child, Master Betty, more than two centuries later. In Act II, Scene II of "Hamlet," Shakespeare makes pointed allusions to this "little aery of children, little eyases". They played, amongst other things, Jonson's "Poetaster," a satire aimed against dramatists and actors in general and the dramatists Marston and Dekker in particular, with whom Jonson had a feud. Shakespeare's company replied by producing Dekker and Marston's "Satirio-Mastix," or the "Untrussing of the Humorous Poet!" The result was a duel which vastly entertained the public, divided into two groups, one for the children and one for the adults. The receipts of both theatres went up by leaps and bounds, and it is not surprising to find the opponents rapidly coming to better terms. It is said that Shakespeare played a considerable part in the peace-making, and, indeed, that he only took sides in the controversy at all as a protest against the children, not against Ben Jonson. He could indeed afford to be magnanimous, for he was now to produce a play which settled the question of supremacy for all time.

The year 1602 is not generally considered a particularly important one in history, yet during it England did a deed which has won the approval of the whole civilized

world ever since, and which has elicited and will continue to elicit undying applause so long as worlds and nations last. "Hamlet" was produced. So great and instantaneous was its success, that publication immediately followed production.

A play based on the story of Hamlet seems to have occupied a place in the traffic of the English stage for many years. In the "Histories and Tragedies" of Belleforest a "Historye of Hamblett" occurs, a translation of which appeared in 1608, so that if Shakespeare borrowed the story from there he must have read it in French.

"Hamlet" is, as all the world knows, primarily a character study, the study of a noble being, in every sense of the word, placed by force of circumstances in an ignoble position. In this it resembles the great Greek tragedy "Œdipus". If Œdipus is the king of tragedies, Hamlet is the prince. Œdipus sets out to *find* the "something rotten" in the State, Hamlet is suddenly brought face to face with it. Both men suffer the most unpleasant, unexpected, and horrible revelations. Both are almost super-conscientious, and both are, in the best sense of the word, egoists. Œdipus conceives *himself* to be evil, the cause of the trouble, the unclean thing, the abhorred of the gods.

> The time is out of joint:—O cursèd spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!—

says Hamlet. Both men have been brought up in certain fixed religious codes. One, unfortunately for himself, believes them and heeds them; the other, perhaps equally unfortunately, does not. Œdipus believes in fate, a Calvinistic, black justice, and applies his theories relentlessly to himself. Hamlet, who is by way of being a Christian, hearkens to a ghost who says, in

effect, "Vengeance is yours," and on his own showing does not stop to try the spirit, whether it be of God or the devil. There is some doubt on the subject until the ghost begins to speak. It certainly comes in a questionable shape; and Hamlet could scarcely be expected to realize all at once that his father has come from hell. But the father soon tells him so and delivers his message, which Hamlet, being human and a dutiful son, could scarcely be expected to reject. Had he been able to review the whole situation dispassionately, he might not have accepted it so unreservedly. He would perhaps have done what he could, not attempted to do what he could not. One wonders what he would have done. Perhaps he would have denounced the guilty couple and then left them to the justice of the State, and not tried to constitute himself judge, tribunal, and executioner in one.

He would certainly never have done less than his duty. He did more. He was unjust to himself. And so was Œdipus. Œdipus punished himself, and believed that the gods punished him for sinning wittingly, where he had only sinned unwittingly. It was as though he had been punished for murder when he had only committed manslaughter. He blindly believed in a cruel, unjust fate. The physical blindness with which he afflicted himself was the indirect result of the moral darkness which education and environment had inflicted on him. He believed himself a thing abhorred of the gods. Had he reversed the process and abhorred such gods he might have averted the tragedy of fate. As soon as Œdipus saw the evil he corrected it and removed the plague-spot. He had the moral courage to do that, but he had neither the moral courage nor the perception to go still farther and reverse the other and

more pestilential plague-spots, his and his people's gods. He went under; a victim to education, environment, heredity, superstition,—what you will. That is the tragedy of Œdipus. And that is, surely, the tragedy of tragedies!

Neither Œdipus nor Hamlet apply their own principles of justice to themselves. They are indeed abstract principles. To expect them to do so is to expect them to be more than human. That is perhaps the tragedy. The human note is the tragic note. That is why the plays live and will continue to live as long as human nature.

The tragedy of Œdipus is swifter and more poignant than that of Hamlet, because, perhaps, it comes so terribly home to himself. From the time the horrible truth is revealed until the moment when Œdipus stumbles forth self-blinded into the wilderness, from the revelation to the catastrophe is only a matter of seconds. "Œdipus" is really a one-act, a last-act play, the sudden flowering of the poisonous plant of a seed sown years before the play opens. We are only told of what went on underground. "Hamlet" is, by comparison, long drawn out. Œdipus is detective, judge, executioner, and culprit all in one. The people of Athens are the jury, absolutely united in opinion. They could scarcely be otherwise after such a summing up. Hamlet is only the detective, he never quite constitutes himself the judge, but makes futile efforts to take the law into his own hands, and to clear the whole dirty business up without its coming into open court. And for this no one will blame him.

He acts mainly out of consideration for others. He can scarcely believe this "thing" of his mother. And yet her re-marriage to his uncle has already given him

a bad shock, as we see from the very first soliloquy. Hamlet's humanity is already beginning to trouble him. Then comes the revelation of the ghost.

It is hardly surprising that he is knocked mentally a little off his balance. But he is suffering from sanity quite as much as insanity. He makes the discovery that he has been living in a world of illusion, and this is a step toward sanity. But it is not unnatural that he should stagger a little when things are thus swept away from beneath him, and that he should become wild-eyed and dishevelled in appearance.

When folk are going through a period of acute mental distress, caused quite as frequently by sanity as by insanity, they often become dishevelled dressers and dirty feeders. Their minds are occupied, for the time being, with bigger things. It is a transitional state. With the big question settled, tidiness and order will come again. But Hamlet seems to have knowingly exaggerated these things, partly with the object of throwing dust in the eyes of those around him. Below the surface, his behaviour during his so-called madness is very much more sane, thoughtful, and considerate, than it was before the revelation, although those about him do not think so. One could scarcely expect them to do so. Hitherto he has treated them as respectable members of society. Then he suddenly finds out that they are not. Polonius's hairs, grown grey and long in the service of a good master and mistress, may have commanded Hamlet's respect. But that respect was badly shaken when Hamlet discovered the mistress was bad. To grow grey in the service of a bad master or mistress is a doubtful recommendation! Polonius is either an old knave or an old fool. Hamlet kindly gives him the benefit of the doubt and treats him as the latter—in fact,

mitigates it still further and treats him as a babe not yet out of his swaddling clothes—which is exactly what he is.

But Hamlet does not let him off entirely. He cannot resist pinking him in one spot, his obsequious courtiership. "Very like a whale," said Hamlet. "Very like a whale," said Polonius. "Very like a weasel," said Hamlet. "Very like a weasel," said Polonius. "Oh, go to the devil!" said Hamlet—in effect! And Polonius did!

Hamlet is as hard upon himself as upon anyone else, and, if anything, harder. His so-called inconsiderate treatment of Ophelia is really considerate. He is partly cruel to be kind. He loves her quite as much if not more than before, but he is not sure of his love now. He is not sure of love at all! Is love a thing worth having or giving? is not the least of the many questions that puzzle him so sorely.

Moreover, he is scarcely inclined to take any woman for granted, after the revelation. But he loved Ophelia, there is no doubt of that, and deeply do we feel it in that terrible scene of the struggle between him and her brother in the grave.

But the tragedy of Ophelia is only an outer ripple. The scenes between Hamlet and his mother are in the vortex of the tragedy. Act III, Scene IV is one of the saddest and the most heart-rending in the whole range of tragedy. It equals the parting of Œdipus with his children, and the final scenes of "Lear". "Let me wring your heart," says Hamlet. "O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain," says the Queen. And Shakespeare has cleft our hearts in twain. And this terrible scene has been the cause of long and oft-times heated discussion upon such trivial matters as to whether

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this,—" refers to pictures on the wall, miniatures, or whether Hamlet was speaking figuratively. Verily, the drama has its ritualists. A good reason for having the portraits upon the wall, is that it might be more graphic. In scenes of this kind it is wise not to give your audience too much to think about, and not to puzzle their brains whilst wringing their hearts.

The death of Polonius, which at any other time might have been a real tragedy, sinks into utter insignificance beside the living grief of Hamlet and his mother. And so does the character of the King. He is a treacherous, lecherous person of no real importance whatsoever.

This great scene is, I think, the heart of the play. One feels that Hamlet has done all that he can, indeed all that he ought. Henceforward, his own particular troubles concern him less and less, and those of the world in general, the great problem of life, more and more. He is sicklied "more and more" with the pale cast of thought. "All the weary, stale, flat and unprofitable" tricks that are tried on every one that has had a shock and begins to think, have been and are being played upon him, with the difference that there is a sinister and not a kindly motive at the back of every move. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not sent to distract, but to pump him. He is sent out of the country, not for a change of air, but to be got rid of. But the facts are not got rid of so easily as that, and Hamlet returns a sadder, wiser, and, I think, more resolute man. He seems more philosophical, more inclined to await the logic of events. The scene at the graveyard, though inexpressibly sad, is not quite hopeless. It is almost a *reductio ad absurdum*. One feels when Hamlet flings away the skull that that is not all that is

left of poor Yorick, and that imperious Cæsar would not have the slightest objection to his carcass stopping a bung-hole. But then comes the body of Ophelia, and Hamlet's wound breaks out afresh. Then follows the dreadful scene in her grave. Laertes has loved her with the warm-hearted, genuine affection of a brother. Hamlet with the sincere, honest, truthful love of a great and noble man. Neither of them quite understands the other, and Hamlet does not care. He is not mad, he is not irresponsible. He simply does not care —and there is really no reason why he should.

From now on tragedy moves swiftly, the utter futility and uselessness of Hamlet's death is the catastrophe of the play. A magnificent, noble, excellent young prince cut off in his prime; no one, not even the conspirators themselves, a penny the better for his death. There is poetic justice in the death of Brutus; justice in those of Macbeth and Richard; a happy release in the case of Lear; inevitability, after what has happened, in Othello; but Hamlet's death is utterly objectless and hopeless. It is sheer waste, indeed "Waste" would be a good name for "Hamlet". There is one crumb of comfort at the end. The stalwart Horatio remains alive to light his master's good name, and we are moreover made to feel that Fortinbras will do more than his bare duty in that respect. That is the one ray of light in this most sombre, profound and deeply moving tragedy. It is a tragedy of effects, of the far-reaching effects of a hideous crime, from whose blood-sucking tentacles goodness, nobility, and superlative honesty are alike unable to protect or extricate themselves. This is, I believe, contrary to the opinion of many, who regard Hamlet's character as the tragedy, and speak of morbid introspection, inherent lethargy and so on. But, it seems to

me, this is surely not so. Are not the so-called morbid introspection and inherent lethargy the saving of Hamlet—the outcome of his better self? We are told they paralyse the will; but do they not rather check the rash impulse and prevent the further accumulation of the crime,—break the snowball, so to speak? Supposing Hamlet had killed his mother and step-father, we should have had a repetition of the hideous Orestean tragedy. He should have denounced them publicly, says your cold-blooded moralist, and doubtless he is right in theory, but he does not take the humanity of Hamlet, his nobility, chivalry and human affections into account. These are the things that paralyse Hamlet's will, not the introspective workings of his brain. In short, in the great issues of his life, he is governed by his heart, as the average human being always is, and, let us hope, always will be. Cynics may say he is governed by his pocket, but if so why is he poor? Those who frankly and honestly make money their objective generally get it. But your average mortal falls between two stools, and he may take comfort from the fact that the floor is perhaps more comfortable than one of them.

Hamlet represents, in many respects, the average man; hence his undying popularity, and Macready's shrewd dictum that no actor can altogether fail in the part. Of course his finely developed intellect places him in some ways above the average man, but the application of that very intellect and his superlatively honest self-analysis tell him he is no better and no worse than his neighbour. There is no superiority about Hamlet. If ever there was an "earnest seeker after truth" it is he. The questions Hamlet asks himself, sooner or later we must all ask ourselves, and when

we are straight enough to ask them, we will probably get the same answers. Hamlet was a prince, if ever there was one, in mind, body, and estate.

Though Hamlet is, of course, the centre of interest in the play, the other characters are all drawn with the master-hand and repay ample study. The King of course is the villain of the piece. He takes the initiative in all the events that follow his great crime, whether he did so previously it is not so easy to say. It seems, however, scarcely probable that the Queen did. She had certainly not the "motive and cue" that Lady Macbeth had. A weak sensuality and passion seem to have been the cause of her downfall, and, like a true daughter of Eve, she raises neither finger nor voice in her own defence. From her criticism of the Player Queen, "methinks the lady doth protest too much," one may, perhaps, draw the conclusion that she speaks from sad experience. But the King is a deep, double-dyed villain, who sticks at nothing in his efforts to get rid of Hamlet.

Of his tools the most despicable are, of course, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Goethe's shrewd conclusion that it would be artistically impossible to separate them, for they are the kind that always hunt in couples, is as interesting as it is convincing. Dirty workers like these never seem able to stand alone. I suppose each must have some one they can look down upon.

Osric, of whom we see not very much but quite enough, is another little toady, more especially if that be a diminutive term for toad.

The most tragic figure in the play after Hamlet is, I think, Ophelia. She does not loom very large, but her lonely, pathetic figure seems to bear the brunt of the

whole tragedy, is absolutely necessary to it, and being the weakest link in the chain is the first to snap. She is absolutely alone. Not a hand is stretched forward to help her or save her. Her silly old fool, and worse than fool, of a father heartlessly makes use of her. Her brother, more alive to his own bright future than to her gloomy present, leaves her with shoals of good advice. Indeed she gets that from every one. Laertes is not to blame. He is genuinely devoted to his sister, but he is in the dark and remains in the dark until after he has received his fatal wound at the close of the play.

She is in dire, desperate need of a little human kindness and sympathy, and none is forthcoming. Polonius has not got it in him, Hamlet dare not offer it. It is scarcely surprising that the poor girl gives way under it all.

The description of her death, put by Shakespeare into the mouth of the Queen, is one of the many miracles of his art. And even in her coffin they will not leave the poor thing alone, and a ritualistic priest and his henchman, the grave-digger, insult her corpse and their own God.

Her brother, Laertes, is a fine young fellow of noble and chivalrous instincts, who has, however, not yet really tasted life. When, at the first sip of it, he cries out, it is not surprising that Hamlet, who has dumbly drained it to the dregs, temporarily loses his self-control.

Polonius is, of course, on old fool, and talks a lot of sound sense, as fools sometimes do. He is probably a widower. Indeed, one feels sure of it. Unless his wife was the same as he was, one or the other would have to go. They might have been separated, but she probably stuck to him for her children's sake, until

death released her. And the two children cling together, treating their father with filial respect, but confiding in each other. The genuine confidence between brother and sister and forced confidence between father and daughter are well contrasted in the scene of Laertes's departure for Paris. It may be presumed that Ophelia and Laertes had no brothers or sisters, and so the extermination of the whole Polonius family was one of the after-effects of Claudius' and Gertrude's crime. A murder that led to eight other deaths!

Of the remaining characters of the play the most interesting are Horatio and the grave-digger.

The character of Horatio needs no unravelling. Hamlet himself gives us the clue. He is a loyal, sturdy, level-headed gentleman, and in nothing does his splendid loyalty become him so well as in his ready acceptance of Hamlet's dying wishes. He demurs at first. "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane." "You're more than either," says Hamlet, in effect, "you're a man." And Horatio bows in submission to Hamlet's superior wisdom, as he always does, when the wisdom *is* superior. But when he thinks otherwise, in the scene with the ghost at the outset of the play, he does not hesitate to say so.

The "absolute" grave-digger is a sheer delight. A pig-headed product that one had thought was somehow peculiar to England! We have a way of thinking that with our bad as well as our good. Doubtless his peculiarities are more professional than national. Man and boy he has been sexton there thirty years. In his spare time he probably takes a "bus-driver's holiday" by attending "crowner's" inquests. Consequently law and ritual form part of his mental make-up. He is naturally a cheery soul, and has handled far too

many corpses to have much respect for death. He is far more than mere comic relief. He lightens the tragedy for Hamlet as well as for the audience, and does his share in helping the Prince to suffer less acutely this last terrible blow.

The construction of "Hamlet" is as masterly as the characterization. It is, as we have seen, the tragedy of the effects of crime, rather than of crime itself, as with "Macbeth" or "Richard III". Therefore we do not see the crime. It is just one of the data supplied to us by the author at the commencement of the play. The first really dramatic occurrence is the revelation to Hamlet. It is like the conversion of St. Paul inverted. Hamlet has been suspicious, kicking against the pricks, being forced against his will to believe and suspect a frightful thing, just as St. Paul was a good one. There is no actual statement that Hamlet suspected the full horror, but in the first soliloquy one feels that he is prepared for anything. And the truth is revealed to him alone, he is lured away to another part of the ramparts. A most important thing, this, showing one of the great advantages that Shakespeare enjoyed in having so few mechanical restrictions to contend with. It is conceivable that were Shakespeare writing nowadays he might be asked at rehearsal if he would mind if the ghost *scared* Hamlet's companions away, and thus saved a scene! However, fortunately for the drama, if unfortunately for him, Hamlet is lured away, and thus the genus of the play is revealed. It is to belong to the objective order, the kind of play in which the audience is "in the know".

Some people think that this is, or ought to be, the only order, but Shakespeare did not, as we shall pre-

sently see. When the grim interview is over the play moves forward another step, and we begin to see the tragedy developing. Hamlet is, for the present at any rate, going to take no one into his full confidence. He is going to try and shoulder this terrible burden alone. And if we are sufficiently alive to the weight of it, we already have a good inkling of the tragedy that is coming.

This is the end of the act, the first act of the tragedy of "Hamlet". Its objects have been fulfilled. We are *au fait* with the situation generally. We are introduced to all the principal personages of the tragedy. We have had a glimpse of Ophelia and her relations with Hamlet. He has woken up out of his fool's paradise. He is no longer a dilettante, a Prince Charming, if he ever was one. He has got his work to do, his ghost-imposed task. He does not relish it, but he conceives it to be his work. The situation is interesting, the atmosphere foreboding.

The opening of the second act is very significant. Laertes has gone, and Ophelia has encountered Hamlet, apparently for the first time since the revelation. In her fright she runs to her father, the worst possible person to whom she could go. He, of course, thinks he knows all about it. Polonius is a prime ingredient for any tragedy. In the next scene the King's suspicions are aroused, and he begins to plot and plan, half unconscious of his real object. Yet he had something at the back of his mind when he chose Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Queen does not seem fully to share his guilt here, but is more or less sincere in her dealings with these two beauties. She walks warily at first, but the meddlesome Polonius puts his oar in, and the boat moves more quickly. There never was a tragedy yet in which some one was not in a hurry.

Then Hamlet appears on the scenes again, and dominates them right up to the end of the play-scene. He has put on "an antic disposition"; he is, indeed, a little off his balance, but it is obvious to the audience that he has most of his wits about him. He sees through Polonius, and also Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the painful interview with Ophelia, he behaves, considering all things, with real restraint, certainly with more than in the last one. His mind is marvellously on the alert, and he seizes the opportunity afforded by the players, with dramatic swiftness and intensity. In his discussions with them he reveals a new aspect of his many-sided character. Something new and fresh is being presented to us at every turn of this wonderful drama.

Hamlet now decides upon his next step, which is to prove to his own satisfaction that the ghost has spoken the truth. That is the situation at the end of the second act, and the play has moved forward by that much. We not only know now that Hamlet is preparing for his first move, we also know what that move is to be.

The third act is the crux of the play, the Aristotleian middle! And a marvellous third act it is! Technically and dramatically it is perfect. In accumulative interest, in its profound tragedy and in unutterable pathos nothing that even Shakespeare himself has done has ever surpassed, or perhaps even equalled it. And it is so perfect that it would make a complete play of itself, a tragedy grand enough to tax all the capabilities and satisfy all the demands of anyone. Each little scene is so complete that we do not need to know what has gone before. The dramatist's mastery of his art is such that he imbues us with his own power to begin anywhere. In this great act we see the effect his dread knowledge has upon Hamlet in his relations with all the principal

characters in the play. First we see him communing with his own self. Then in his new relationship to Ophelia, and this scene impresses upon us perhaps more than anything else could the magnitude and importance of the revelation to Hamlet. Childish things are put away, and with them poor Ophelia. I do not believe Ophelia and Hamlet would ever have been very happy. This scene shows the real gulf between them. Ophelia is no use to Hamlet in this crisis. He only seems to her to have gone mad. The utter loneliness of both is accentuated.

But there is one person who is not at all convinced of Hamlet's madness, indeed he is most uncomfortably suspicious of his sanity; and Shakespeare, with consummate art and skill, allows this person, who is of course the King, to see Hamlet at his maddest, and still to be convinced of his sanity.

"Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go," is the King's sinister remark. For madness read sanity. There is, perhaps, more than one royal personage to-day who can speak feelingly of the significance of such a remark from the mouth of a powerful King.

After this scene there is a little lull in the momentum, not exactly comic relief, but normal relief, in the scene of instruction to the players. Then the refreshing scene between Hamlet and Horatio is a cup of cold water in the desert. But it is only a halt by the wayside. And we soon get to the grim earnestness of the play-scene. The upshot of that every one knows. Hamlet has no longer any doubt. The ghost has spoken truth, the hour has struck. The two sides of the tragedy have, as it were, become one. Hamlet knows, and the King and the Queen too, in her innermost heart, know that he knows. The King, always the most prompt to move,

makes immediate arrangements for his dispatch to England. Hamlet, torn with thoughts of his mother, scarcely gives him a thought, and is taken unawares and surprised, as his audience is, when he suddenly comes upon the King at his prayers. And those prayers saved the King's life then, for, in a very few moments, the death of Polonius shows us what might have happened, and that there is no hesitancy about Hamlet when he is quite clear in his mind.

We have now been led, step by step, to the very heart of the tragedy, which is laid bare to us with simple, matchless art. It is simply the tragedy of lust. Something that even Hamlet does not understand. His mother makes no attempt to defend herself, or to palliate her crime. "Oh, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain," is all that she can say, and about all that he can do. Even the ghost is moved to pity. Towards the close of the interview Hamlet softens, and the last words of this inexpressibly tragic act are the sweet and gentle "Good-night, Mother!"

The secret is now out. Henceforward a state of practically open warfare exists between the two parties. The King again makes the first move, but Hamlet needs another jag from the spur, and to bring this about Shakespeare has recourse to a device which the unhampered conditions of the stage of his day freely permitted him.

Hamlet meets, on a plain in Denmark, a regiment of soldiers embarked upon an expedition apparently not only unjustifiable, but commercially unsound. From this, if successful, they confidently expect to reap glory, honour and renown. "How all occasions do inform against me," says Hamlet, and concludes his soliloquy with the words, "My thoughts be bloody or be nothing

worth ". But, as a matter of fact, the occasions are not informing against him, but for him ; for he does not altogether succumb to the temptation and fall to the level of the common herd.

Then he sets out for England, still cogitating, and Laertes returns to Court. Goaded from fury to fury by his father's death, it only needs the pathetic scene of his sister's madness to make him a weapon primed and ready for use, of which the King is not slow to avail himself. The King is an out-and-out villain, without even the grace, like Macbeth or Richard III, to employ professional murderers to do his killing, he makes use of innocence charged with mistaken righteousness and primed with lies. Hamlet's premature return accelerates matters, and when he arrives on the scenes the mine is prepared and the fuse laid.

Then comes the fifth act, opening with the wonderful grave-yard scene, which seems to prepare and in some ways console us for the inevitable end. The grave-digger is, as I have said, something very much more than mere comic relief. In the grapple between Hamlet and Laertes we have the climax of the King's diabolical cleverness and villainy, the innocent pitted against the innocent in deadly feud. Then the cord snaps. Hamlet's heart is broken. The whole dirty business of life interests him less. He is not so oppressed with a personal sense of his wrongs. He opens his mouth wider to his friend Horatio, he cares less about the rights and wrongs of anything, and is consequently ten times more dangerous. The King evidently grasps this fact and pushes forward his plans.

The last scene is not an anti-climax, for it culminates, in a sense, in the triumph of Hamlet. The ultimate victory is his, although at the cost of his own life. The

sturdy Horatio, the best friend a man ever had, will set his memory right with posterity, helped by the new King Fortinbras, whose cannons bear away on the breeze the last roll of the tragedy of Hamlet.

I have endeavoured to trace, step by step, the dramatic development of this grand tragedy, and to dispel the illusion that seems to exist in some places that the play is too slow in action to be properly dramatic. I believe this to be solely because it is on such a large scale. As with the world, we are unable to see that it is moving at all without a deal of investigation. And Hamlet himself gives a sense of slowness to the whole, but as a matter of fact he is given no opportunity to be slow, for he is continually being harried and moved on from outside. If there is one definite rule for tragedy, it is surely that it must move swiftly. And in that as in all other respects, Hamlet conforms more closely to the rule than one at first realizes. In a small sense, certainly, it ignores the classic unities, in a large sense it obeys them. There is only one scene, the world. Only one time, all time. Only one plot, the everlasting battle between good and evil.

If ever there was a perfect, symmetrical work of art in this world, Hamlet is one. Of the exquisite poetry and literature of the play I scarcely feel myself competent to speak, but surely sweeter and gentler music never fell upon human ears than the description of the dawn in the opening scene:—

> But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill,—

or than the tender pathos of the description of Ophelia's death and Horatio's farewell to his beloved master:—

> Good-night, sweet Prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

Hamlet, as far as is known, was followed by "Troilus and Cressida". The exact date of this composition is very difficult to ascertain. There were two Richmonds in the field. A rival company, the Earl of Nottingham's servants, performed a play of the same name somewhere about the same time, which play, however, long since died a natural death. But its existence sufficed successfully to oppose immediate publication of Shakespeare's play. Piratical publishers appear to have been on the scene, too; more than one of whom issued so-called genuine editions of Shakespeare's play. There are certain characteristics in "Troilus and Cressida" that seem to point to its having followed "Hamlet". Certain indications in the verse and the philosophy seem to show an advance upon anything that preceded Hamlet. On the other hand, as a play, it is very poor, and obviously strung together hastily.

It is just possible that theatrical managers of those days had certain little ways not unknown to those of the present, and that Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" was a hastily prepared rival to "the other house". "Wars and lechery! Wars and lechery," is the reiterated cry of the odious Thersites, in the play. And that cry is the key-note, and might well have been the name of the play. When reading "Troilus and Cressida," it almost seems as though Shakespeare might have been deeply affected by his own tragedy of Hamlet, and seen the world, for the time being, through very green glasses. "Troilus and Cressida" has also been regarded, to quote from Sir Sidney Lee, as a "petty-minded protest against the honour paid to the ancient Greeks and to the form and sentiment of their literature by the more learned dramatists of the day. . . ." There does not seem to be petty mind or protest in "Troilus and Cressida";

but it does sometimes seem to furnish another of the many internal proofs that the author of the play was not a learned man or a scholar, but a man who wrote out of his own heart. The learned dramatists, headed by Ben Jonson, were partly scholars with, perhaps, some of the scholar's childish ignorance of life. It is quite possible, indeed, that Homer with his magic and majestic pen performed the same service for the ancient Greek heroes, that later and lesser writers have done for Robin Hood or Dick Turpin. Judging these gentlemen by their acts, which is what a dramatist might be expected to do, wars and lechery seem to have been their principal occupations. When they were not making war they were making love. Ulysses, Agamemnon and others, as depicted by Shakespeare, are neither despicable, nor particularly heroic. Shakespeare was as free from the rubbish and cant of hero-worship as he was of the self-righteous total condemnation of villains! "Troilus and Cressida," in spite of its shortcomings, is the play of a genius whose intuitive knowledge of life could not and would not be shaken by books or pedantry. When all is said, may not Shakespeare and Homer be summed up respectively as the immortal poets of humanity and imagination?

The plot of "Troilus and Cressida" is one that would serve admirably for a modern musical comedy, or a French *opéra bouffe*. The happenings are just of a kind that might be expected to go on at the tail of an army. The characters are slightly but surely sketched in. Ulysses, Agamemnon, and Nestor are distinguished, sagacious generals, whose breasts would be covered with orders in our day. Achilles is a vain, sulky brute, whose method of defeating Hector would be treated with scant courtesy by a schoolboy. The

same boy would describe Ajax as an ass, and Hector as a pompous fool who goes about the place asking for trouble. Pandarus is the origin of the word to pander, which is a sufficient description. Troilus is the one to whom he panders. Cressida cannot be described in polite terms. Helen might, with advantage, have taken a leaf out of Lucretia's book, only it was not published then. Paris is a poor thing. Thersites who, like Cressida, is indescribable in terms polite, fills the place occupied in other and more pleasant plays by the fools. He looks on at the panorama, and expresses his opinion of it in "good plain set terms".

The mad Cassandra is really the redeeming feature of the play. Her ravings are very much to the point. But all these characters (mean specimens though most of them undoubtedly are) are wonderfully clearly touched in; and the whole play, poor though it is, exhibits the firm touch of the master, and shows no traces whatever of the scholar.

But "Troilus and Cressida" was but the prelude to one of Shakespeare's mightiest achievements; for it was followed by "Othello"; produced in 1604. King James had succeeded to the throne of Elizabeth, and went even farther than that royal lady in his patronage of the players and admiration of Shakespeare. "Othello," apparently the first new play to be performed before him, was played at Whitehall on 1 November. As a work of art, pure and simple, some are inclined to place it first of all Shakespeare's plays. In some ways it does seem more complete than the others, but that may be because it is more easily grasped, as a whole. The plot is simple. The characters engaged in developing it are few in number. The interest is homely and domesticated. Superficially, the story is

a simple domestic tragedy, of the havoc produced by an idle-tongued mischief-maker; but beneath the surface, the play seems to touch upon one of the greatest human mysteries; the racial problem, the tragedy of black and white. There is a fierce frenzy in Othello's wrath that can scarcely be accounted for merely by his outraged jealousy. He is an exceptional man, a noble being who by his prowess, bravery and nobility has lifted himself not only out of the class, but out of the race to which he was born. He has won the heart and hand of a great white lady, and his character enforces, if not the approval, at least the admiration of her father and her State. He has attained to dizzy heights,—far higher, probably, than his wildest dreams had imagined. They are almost too good to be true. Moreover Othello, like all lovers, is never quite sure of himself, and the splendid recital to the senate of his courtship seems made quite as much to convince himself as those "most potent, grave, and reverend signiors". And they are more convinced than Othello. His convictions are easily shaken. "She loved me for the dangers I had passed," said he; and yet very little makes him suspect that she loves Cassio, who, apparently, had not passed so many, nor had such a dazzling career, and whose romances seem mainly to have been concerned with ladies of the Bianca type.

These lover-like doubts on Othello's part are, as is usual, more than counterbalanced by the quite superhuman attractions with which he endows Desdemona. This state of mind, characteristic of lovers, is capable of two explanations. Either your lover is temporarily endowed with real insight, and sees people as they really are, or else he puts the adored object on a pedestal, because, in his conceit, he cannot imagine

himself loving anything that is not on one! If the first explanation is the real one—and let us hope it is! —it seems a difficult position to hold, and we are liable to lose our balance and fall out of love as quickly as we fell in. If the second be true, (it is possible they both are), when the inevitable crash comes, either the image will break, or the lover has got to learn the wholesome lesson of loving an ordinary mortal. In Othello's case the image breaks, but his is an exceptional case, for, the image does not fall to the level, but far below the level of an ordinary mortal, and Othello himself comes tumbling down with it. This dizzy height to which he has climbed is no height. This goddess to whom he has aspired is no goddess. Not only Desdemona, but his ideal has failed him, the white race has failed him, the whole pack of cards has come tumbling about his ears. It is the most frightful catastrophe that he, or indeed anyone, could conceive happening to him. And it is all a lie, and the result of a lie. But Othello thinks it true, and hence the tragedy. When Othello enters Desdemona's bedroom with the intention of killing her, there is one good thing left among the ruin, his personal love for Desdemona still glows amongst the embers until it is quenched by the lie.

> O perjured woman ! thou dost stone my heart,
> And mak'st me call what I intend to do
> A murder, which I thought a sacrifice,

is Othello's answer to her denial that she had given Cassio the handkerchief, and this denial explains fully his state of mind, almost of self-righteousness. He had thought to make a sacrifice. Desdemona was an unclean thing, which he loved, but of which the world must be ridded lest it be corrupted. It was the savage

instinct which, among wild animals, will kill the diseased member of the pack, and which still exists in more refined forms amongst humans. Othello is a savage, a savage who has taken on the veneer of civilization and then just as the real wood is about to be engrained with that veneer, the veneer is ripped off by a savage, white with the hellish villainy which only civilization—save the mark!—can produce. It is not surprising that the frenzied fury of his reaction appals every one, even Iago himself. There does not seem to me to be very much subtlety in the character of Othello. He is a simple soul, with simple, elementary passions, and elementary virtues. He sees things in black and white. Indeed, Othello is a tragedy of black and white in more than one sense of the word. The contrast between the simplicity of Othello and the duplicity of Iago is marked, but there is a certain elementariness about both. If Othello is, in some ways, an elementary hero, Iago is an elementary villain. He is a fiend, pure and simple, an absolute fiend. I have seen him portrayed as an impish fiend, who pursued his horrible way from sheer love of mischief, quite as much as from revenge or jealousy. But he seems to me not to have even that redeeming feature. He is a callous, cold-blooded, calculating horror; a disease, a nightmare, and to analyse him seems as difficult as to analyse a dream. The best description of himself comes out of his own mouth, as is often the case with villains. It is part of their villainy to analyse themselves aright, to the too confiding. "Put money in thy purse" seems to be his watchword, and his object in life is to get things. He is a thief who thieves for the sake of thieving, and steals not only money, but that also "which not enriches him," except in so far as he seems to get some

kind of hellish satisfaction out of the operation. He is a liar as well as a thief. As a matter of fact one cannot be the one without the other, or the other without the one. Moreover he is a chatterbox. His tongue is his unruly member. Perhaps even he is aghast at the mischief that he has done, and that his last line, "From this time forth I never will speak word," has some bearing on this fact.

Simplicity, too, is the keynote of Desdemona's character, at the same time she is no mere sentimental schoolgirl, caught by the glamour of Othello's romantic history. Her very quietness and reticence show that there is no "highfalutin," no rhapsodizing about her. She allows her actions to proclaim her feelings, and her simple declaration before the Senate shows the depth of those feelings and the force of her character more than volumes could have done. From first to last she never grumbles, never chides, but is a simple, loving, pure-minded soul, unable even to listen to the tongue of calumny. When Othello calls her opprobrious names, she shudders at the mere sound of them and goes out of the room. Many young ladies would be very upset, most righteously indignant and all the rest of it, chiefly because the names were applied to themselves, but Desdemona will have nothing to do with them simply because they are horrible things in themselves, and brushes them away as she would a filthy insect. She is led like a lamb to the slaughter and is dumb before the slaughterer, whom she forgives and blesses with her last words. The tragedy of the last scene but one is unutterable, her plaintive singing of the "willow song" and pathetic failure to grasp the position are sad beyond words, and accentuate alike the utter inability of good and bad to comprehend one another, and the gulf be-

tween her and Othello. One has raised himself to a high state of civilization and refinement, the other is born to a higher one. The final catastrophe is too ghastly and too horrible to dwell upon. One is thankful never to have seen it properly played. The best Othello I have had the pain of witnessing is Grasso, the Sicilian player, but he only gave half the character, and did not really begin to play it till the third act, till the veneer has begun to wear off. He had no veneer. Moreover, the Desdemona did not rise to the occasion, and the final scene was not unlike a brawl.

The remaining characters are not particularly interesting, although they are all sketched in with the usual unfaltering hand. Roderigo and Cassio are both feeble specimens, easily duped by Iago, as indeed are practically all the characters of the play, excepting Emelia, his wife, who half sees through him, and bides her time and bides too long.

The construction of the play, like the characterization, is simple and straightforward. At the outset the audience is let into the secret of Iago's scheming. The play begins the moment the curtain is up, as is customary with Shakespeare, and thenceforward moves with almost incredible swiftness to the end. The author wastes no time in concealing his art with strange devices. The first act is a sort of prologue, the second takes us to the scene of the tragedy. Incidentally this act is not unlike the second act of a modern pantomime, where all the characters find themselves gathered together on one small island. In this act the train is laid. In the third it is fired, and in the fourth it spreads with appalling fury. Iago is as quick to make an opportunity as he is to seize one. The dismissal of Cassio is contemplated, conceived and completed within the limits of one act.

The opportunity to avail himself of the handkerchief is snatched as quickly as the handkerchief is. Othello's mind is poisoned beyond cure in one act; the great third act, where we see him tottering over the brink of the precipice, whence nothing can save him. In the fourth act Iago is already setting to work to cover up his tracks, before the final consummation of his plans, and the act ends, full of foreboding, with the tragic willow scene. The fifth act is the catastrophe and completion of the tragedy.

The exact duration of the tragedy is not mentioned; but excluding the time taken in crossing to Cyprus it may well have been less than a week.

As a stage play, "Othello" seems to me to surpass, and to be more complete than anything Shakespeare had previously written, perhaps than anything he was afterwards to write. It is the most eminently actable of his plays, and to be seen at its best must be seen acted. The dialogue is essentially dramatic, although, of course, it teems with poetry and philosophy. Could anything offer a finer opportunity to an actor than Othello's farewell? When reading it you wish to hear it spoken, when hearing it spoken you do not wish particularly to read it, and ponder over it as you do over the exquisite poetry of "Hamlet" or "Romeo and Juliet". The only possible drawback to "Othello" as an acted play is that the catastrophe is so frightful as to be almost unbearable. The wish to see it properly played is almost morbid.

"Othello" was immediately followed by "Measure for Measure," or, in other words, "Tit for Tat".

Though not of course approaching "Othello" in grandeur of conception, or dramatic force, it is wonderfully complete as a work of art, and exhibits a compre-

hensive grasp of a universal and unpleasant subject, which to this day engages the attentions and generally defeats the abilities of legislators and reformers alike. The sex problem. Like the Mikado of a later day, but with less humour, Angelo, the regent, attempts to control the amorous propensities of his subjects for the time being. And with the usual result. He finds himself hoist with his own petard. Shakespeare, as usual, offers no solution, and preaches no conscious sermon; he simply presents the problem, in all its many aspects, and with wonderful fidelity to life. Most of the characters in the play are engaged, one way or another, in the same unedifying pursuit that they are condemning. Even the best of them, the Duke, procures Mariana for Angelo, and Isabel, the Novice, connives at the procuration. They both do it for the best of reasons, no doubt, but so does Elbow, the frank professional bawd, who does it for a living, and is afterwards promoted to be public hangman. Isabel does it also, that her brother may live, and is, in her turn, promoted, to have power over life and death.

"Measure for Measure," though of course not ranked among Shakespeare's greatest plays, yet bears every indication of the maturity of genius. It is undoubtedly the play of a very great man, with a very full, fair, and comprehensive view of life, who spares nobody, yet in a sense spares everybody. Who sees at once the immense vitality and significance of the problem with which he has to deal. The play is a sordid, unpleasant one, but most people would be all the better for reading it, and it should form part of the standard library of every one who has anything to do with the governing of people or the making of laws. It was succeeded by another of Shakespeare's supreme masterpieces.

"Macbeth," surely the greatest tragedy of sheer villainy that has yet been given to the world, was produced in the year 1606. It is said to have been begun in 1605, and by some is thought to have been inspired by a possible visit to Scotland in 1601. There is no actual proof that Shakespeare was in Scotland in September, 1601, but there is documentary evidence in the archives of Aberdeen that a company of players known as the King's Servants played in the town at that time, and that the freedom of the borough was conferred on Lawrence Fletcher, a comedian. Lawrence Fletcher afterwards figures very prominently in the same company of the King's Servants in London as Shakespeare does. It has never been conclusively proved that this company and the King's London company were one and the same, but it seems scarcely probable that the King had a company of "servants" in Scotland as well as in England.

It was exceptional for any company to be called the King's Servants. As a rule they were known as the "Lord Chamberlain's Servants," but King James had bestowed especial marks of his esteem on the Shakespearean company, nine members of whom, including Shakespeare, had marched in the Royal procession on the occasion of the King's formal entry into London. And each actor was given four and a half yards of scarlet cloth, as a "wedding garment" for the occasion.

It was also improbable that there should be two actors of the same name, and both comedians, in the two companies. Assuming then that the companies were one and the same, there is still no proof that Shakespeare was "on tour" with his company. On the other hand there is no proof that he was not. It is known that he was at Stratford with his father a few

weeks before the visit to Scotland, but we do not know how long that visit lasted. So the opponents of the Scottish visit cannot prove an alibi for Shakespeare. At the same time it is a curious fact that neither Shakespeare nor Burbage, both of whom held a superior position in the company to Fletcher, should be mentioned in any of the documentary evidence, and not have had the freedom of the city bestowed upon them. It is quite possible, indeed it seems probable, that both Shakespeare and Burbage took a rest, whilst the remainder of the company, headed by Fletcher, the star for the time being, went on tour, and advertised themselves as the "King's Servants," trusting to the half-truth to do some drawing. A managerial trick that is not yet extinct!

Whether Shakespeare was in Aberdeen or not, one thing is certain, and that is that he knew more about the neighbourhood than Holinshed did. The story of Macbeth was taken bodily from Holinshed's "Chronicles," the scenery seems to have been taken from the locality, for the descriptions in the play tally, not with Holinshed, but with Inverness, Dunsinane, Birnam, and the neighbourhood. There is no "blasted heath" in Holinshed, but there are several in the above neighbourhood, and fortunately there are remarks in the play which help one to place it fairly accurately.

Another curious fact is that at the time of the players' visit, Aberdeen seems to have been still agitated with the excitement caused by a recent *cause célèbre* in which several witches were condemned and burnt for practices precisely similar to those of the three old ladies in Macbeth. Were Shakespeare an ordinary being, one might reasonably presume from all this that he must have been on the spot, but it is quite possible

that he got it all by hearsay from Fletcher and wove it into the story he had previously read in the "Chronicles". Teeming with genius as he was, and always on the look-out for good material for a play, he would scarcely have missed this.

"Macbeth" is the swiftest, shortest, and grimmest of all the Shakespearian tragedies. It shows every sign of speed, though none of haste. Indeed its completeness, as a work of art, gives one a sense of repose, like a wheel going round very rapidly.

From the moment, at the opening of the play, when the witches plant the germ of ambition in Macbeth's mind, until that at the close, where he, metaphorically, hears the mocking laughter in his ears, and speaks the lines:—

> And he these juggling fiends no more believed,
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope,

the action never stops. Nor does it actually stop there; for though, in a sense, the play is ended, the work of the dramatist is not quite complete, the stage has to be swept clear of the grisly remains. Even the dawn of a new epoch is indicated, a thing Shakespeare never omits to do. But the play proper is concerned with the witches' frolic, their prophecy and its fulfilment, as far only as Macbeth is concerned. The Banquo succession is, so to speak, another story. There never was a great story or a great play yet that did not contain the germ of another one.

Like Richard III, Macbeth is the tragedy of ambition and villainy combined. In a sense it is on a higher plane than Richard. The hero, if we may call him such, is not such a consummate scoundrel as

Richard, and the heroine is not altogether without a redeeming trait of unselfishness. She is partly ambitious for her husband. They are the right couple going down the wrong path. She supplies his deficiencies, and depletes his sufficiencies. She invokes the spirits of evil to turn her own milk to gall, and does the same to the milk of human kindness in her husband. She is the fourth witch, and the most terrible. She tends the seed planted by the other three. There is a certain sort of villainous honesty about her, as there is about Richard. She never deceives herself. She frankly invokes the evil spirits. There is no cant about either Lord or Lady Macbeth. Macbeth does not leave the dirty work to his God, as canters sometimes do, but leaves it to chance.

> **If chance will have me King, why, chance**
> **May crown me, without my stir.**

Which almost implies that if the chance is an evil one he will at least be a passive resister. But not so Lady Macbeth. She does not take chances but opportunities. The play and interplay between these two characters is marvellous. It forms in a sense the human interest of the play, of which the theme is ambition, and the plot the devil.

Macbeth is a poet gone wrong, and his lady sees that he goes wrong. When his courage wants "screwing to the sticking place" she is the screw-driver. When he has got there she retires into the background and drops hints. "But in them nature's copy's not eterne." Then she collapses, and it almost seems as if the devil that has gone out of her has entered Macbeth. A great change comes over him. "The firstlings of his heart become the firstlings of his hand,"

and he hustles along on his headlong course of crime, until the welcome end, as welcome to him as to Scotland. And Shakespeare has drawn both criminals so humanely and so humanly, that we find ourselves sympathizing with and pitying them both. The game has so obviously not been worth the candle. They have both so clearly been the victims of illusion. They are neither of them criminals in one sense. They do not enjoy killing people. Macbeth can scarcely bring himself to do it, Lady Macbeth keeps her eyes glued on results and ignores the process, like most victims of illusion. It is not only at the end of her life that she is afflicted with thick-coming fancies. The sleep-walking scene is most deeply tragic and pathetic, more so even than Macbeth's last speech. "Life's but a shadow, . . . a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." There is a sort of comfort in his philosophy. He is quite willing to give up what he has found not worth having. The philosophic attitude of detachedness towards his actions which he has always endeavoured to keep seems to come to his rescue in his extreme moment. But it is not so with Lady Macbeth, who is caught in the toils, and on whom the pangs of hell have laid hold. Some think, on what grounds I do not quite know, unless they are medical ones, that she died by her own hand, but that seems to me almost impossible. She has no longer even the initiative to do that. She is utterly broken down and has no will, no individuality, left. Raving madness seems to be her almost inevitable fate. But, perhaps, in a last flickering moment of sanity she did the wisest thing she ever did and put an end to herself. Macbeth's last words about her, "She should have died hereafter," though difficult to understand, are tender

and touching. They seem to imply that such an event should have had a time and place all to itself, not to have been crowded out by other things. Perhaps, too, they contain a germ of hope that had she lived longer more might have been understood and more forgiven. Macbeth's constancy says very much for him and something for Lady Macbeth. There was some good in both of them. Though both criminals of the deepest dye, their temptations were very great, and others have done as much for less. Nothing is much less interesting than the ordinary common criminal, whose villainy is generally in proportion to his dullness. But Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are most intensely interesting, sharing between them the entire interest of the play, the other characters of which, though, of course, finely drawn, are mainly only accessories.

Next to the human, the principal interest of the play is the supernatural interest, which plays a larger part than in any other play of Shakespeare's, unless we except "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and class the fairies as supernatural. But they are eminently natural little beggars. The sinister shadow of the witches pervades the scenes in "Macbeth" as completely as the sprightly spirit of fairyland invades those in "The Dream". And the witches of "Macbeth" are the genuine article, not pantomime witches who ride on broomsticks and do conjuring tricks. They do not turn folk needlessly and uselessly into black cats and things. Theirs is art; black, of course, but art. It has a purpose and an object, it is no mere witches' frolic. The scene in the cavern with its apparitions and visions is, of course, magical; but there is method in the magic. It is the natural, or rather the supernatural (subnatural would perhaps be more correct!)

outcome of their filthy work at the outset of the tragedy. When they go to Macbeth, "in the day of success," they drop hints. When he goes to them, in the hour of danger, they do more than drop hints. They put up visions, and juggle with words.

And the prophecies are brought to pass, and the words come true—to the *letter*.

The whole business is allegorical, metaphysical, metaphorical. The three witches individually seem to typify ambition, greed, love of power; collectively, to typify illusion. Macbeth is the victim of illusion. A throne is dangled before his eyes, and two before his lady's, and together they struggle and stumble along, their eyes fixed on the goal, heedless alike of how they bruise others and themselves on the way, till at last they reach the throne, so covered with their own and other people's blood and bruises, that they are unable to occupy it with any comfort. The head that wears a crown lies uneasy, we are told, but still more uneasy is the bruised head that wears a crown, and more especially if the bruises are self-inflicted.

Macbeth is an absolute study of illusion, whether conscious or unconscious on Shakespeare's part, who can say? Personally I believe he was a master builder who used the materials ready to hand, with due regard to their suitability and adaptability to his purpose, but without precisely analysing their ingredients. He knew green wood when he saw it. He could gauge to an infinite exactitude the supporting strength of a beam. But I do not believe he bothered much as to what sort of wood the beam was composed of, unless there were very special reasons for employing a special sort. This analysing is the duty of critics, who, in a sense, are the dogs that eat the crumbs that fall from their master's

table. And why not? Better to eat one's master's crumbs than serve one's own husks!

The other characters of the play, though none of them approach Macbeth and his lady in interest and importance, are all interesting, in tone with the rest of the picture. Banquo is a fine, straightforward soldier, of the Horatian brand. "In the great hand of God I stand," his own expression accurately describes his attitude. He stands for the right with unflinching courage, obviously alive to the risk he is running. And, as his remark shows, he depends upon a power outside of himself for his protection. The one or two actors that I have seen play this part, generally seem to me to have portrayed Banquo as depending too much upon his own right arm. They have gripped their swords by the hilt and shouted the words to the gallery in almost the heroic manner. Surely the words should be spoken straight at Macbeth, in a tense manner, scarcely above a whisper, with a tongue almost cleaving to the roof of the mouth.

Nothing would impress the superstitious Macbeth more with the danger to be expected from that quarter. When Banquo is put out of the way another is instantly found to take his place, and that other is Macduff, as straightforward and brave, but not as matured as Banquo.

If Macduff had suspected as much as Banquo, or indeed known as much, he would surely never have left his wife and children behind. At the same time he does sometimes seem to be one of those fervent patriots who occasionally forget these little things. The scene between him and Malcolm in Act IV is one of Shakespeare's splendid duologues, worthy to rank with Brutus and Cassius, or Hamlet and Horatio. Malcolm is a

most interesting character, a King's son, who has already had sufficient buffets from the world to make him wise beyond his years. He will trust no one, but test every one. He already "wears upon his baby brow the round and top of sovereignty," and is marked out as being the man who will cleanse the Augean stable and purge Scotland of all traces of the tyrant. The murderers are most interesting and convincing. They are men of the sort that one can imagine Guy Fawkes to have been. Sportsmen in one sense of the word, not necessarily hating the thing they kill. Murderers by profession, mercenaries without any personal malice. Professional gentlemen whose business it is to keep their mouths shut and ask no questions. Quite the right instruments for dirty work. Macbeth is growing more experienced in crime when he employs them. The risky bungling of his first attempt has taught him a lesson, and not even his wife is admitted to the secret of his second effort.

> Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed.

And even the murderers are not trusted. A third murderer appears on the scenes at the last moment, with, apparently, sealed instructions.

With the exception of Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff is the only woman character in the play. Hecate and the witches can scarcely be classed as women, if, indeed, Lady Macbeth can. Little is seen of Lady Macduff, just sufficient to tell us her besetting sin. She was certainly not a wise woman, and one cannot help sympathizing with her husband, but perhaps he would have done better to have taken her a little more into his confidence. She might have been a little less bewildered and more ready to act when the hawks swooped. At

the same time she certainly does let her tongue run on rather freely with her little boy, and, with almost inconceivable foolishness, tells him her somewhat hastily formed opinion of his father's conduct.

Knowing her little failing, Macduff was evidently in an awkward position. He had a choice of evils, between the devil of her garrulity and the deep sea of his own reticence. He undoubtedly chose what would generally be adjudged the lesser evil, but perhaps the best way of stopping tongues that wag too freely is to put heavy weights on them in the shape of responsibilities.

The remaining characters in the play are pawns whose presence is necessary to the game, but whose characters have practically nothing to say to it. Chief amongst them is the drunken porter; a splendid fellow, from a dramatist's point of view, of whose scene we shall have more to say in discussing the construction of the play. Like "Othello," "Macbeth" is a marvel of simplicity, sureness, and swiftness in construction. At the opening we see the train being laid by the villains of the piece, the witches, and the trap is prepared for the hero before he comes on the scenes.

After the witches' opening scene there comes a scene with a "bleeding sergeant," which is not generally considered to be Shakespeare's work, but a bit of grafting upon the part of some none too skilful play doctor. This opinion is generally based upon the inferiority of the poetry and style of the scene, which is from a constructional point of view equally weak; for its sole purpose is to provide the audience with a premature answer to the witches' prophecy about the Thaneship of Cawdor. Consequently when Macbeth first hears the news and reason of his succession the effect is not nearly so electric as it might be. Moreover, the inclusion of this scene

entails the repetition, in front of the audience, of the whole story of the Thane of Cawdor's downfall, a piece of bad construction of which we can scarcely imagine Shakespeare to be guilty. As the play was not printed until nearly twenty years after it was written, and ten after its author died, it is quite probable that the scene was inserted by some timid producer, fearful of concealing anything from his audience, under the impression that they were all as thick-headed as himself. Of course it is just possible that Shakespeare intended some such scene in order to give us a hint as to how the witches came by their prophecies, but there is nothing in their talk amongst themselves to lead one to suppose that they have been eavesdropping. However, they know something that Macbeth thought was not generally known, and they drop a hint of something more, which Macbeth, flushed with victory and success, is half-disposed to receive and credit. His opening words, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," are more true than he realizes. Then the witches vanish, and swift as thought their first prophecy is fulfilled. Then the King enters, and would plant Macbeth in his heart, but the witches have already planted the tares there. Macbeth will haste to Inverness, and warn his wife of the King's approaching visit. This is the first mention we have had of Lady Macbeth, but we are not told anything about her. Not a hint do we get, but we get one about him.

> Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.

But we are not left long in doubt as to Lady Macbeth's character. From the moment she appears upon the scenes we know all about her, and very soon about him

too. Cowardice is evidently his weak spot. He will not do dirty work himself, but has no objection to having it done for him. However, she has no intention of encouraging or fostering that little weakness. It is not the occasion for it. This is something that he will have to do for himself, and do it at once.

The messenger who arrives before Macbeth to say that the King is coming, convinces Lady Macbeth of that and steels her heart. Having regard to this little trait in Macbeth's character, one wonders whether this message was as innocent as it seemed; Macbeth may have thought of this plan to give his wife the opportunity of taking the initiative. Whether that is so or not, she certainly does take it, and the scene, though short, is one of the most portentous and foreboding in all Shakespeare.

In the next scene the fly walks into the spider's parlour, and in the scene following that the male spider shies at his gruesome task until goaded on by the fiendish tactics of the female, who blinds his eyes to the consequences just as he is beginning to realize them, and the first act of the drama closes. The train has been laid, the match applied, and everything is in readiness for the first explosion. It occurs at the very opening of the second act. We hear it, but we do not see it. With consummate art and knowledge Shakespeare contrives that the grisly deed shall take place behind closed doors. He *never* oversteps the modesty of nature. Like the old Greek dramatists, he seems to have had unerring knowledge of where to leave off.

The most horrible murder that occurs on the stage in Shakespeare is the strangling of Desdemona, and that probably took place behind the bed-curtains. One of the greatest of Othellos, Salvini, is said to have marred

the whole of his performance by making the murder of Desdemona too realistic.

After the murder of Duncan comes the drunken porter scene. Some say that it is the interpolation of another writer; others, that, though it is by Shakespeare, it is altogether unworthy of him, and is playing to the gallery, or rather to the groundlings.

Both opinions seem to me to display ignorance and lack of observation, of art and life respectively. The drunken porter is splendidly written and conceived obviously in line with other clowns of Shakespeare. The whole scene is surely in tone with the rest of the picture, in its right place.

I do not believe, for one moment, that it was inserted for the sole purpose of pleasing the groundlings, but I do believe that the groundlings were, possibly, the sole members of the audience who appreciated it at its full value.

Those who have burrowed right down into the grim under-world of life, know that it is often just at these terrible moments that something funny happens, and this knowledge often seems quite unaccountable and inconceivable to the learned arm-chair critic.

After the murder, Macbeth's courage fails him for the moment, and Lady Macbeth takes upon herself the dirty work of making the innocent to appear guilty, then Macbeth under the impulses of fear and self-preservation recovers his nerve and kills the scapegoats.

Blood has now flowed. The crime has begun and so has the pursuit of the criminals. From the moment that Macbeth and Banquo stand facing each other, the one bluffing and lying, the other trembling and defying, but trusting "in the great hand of God," we know who is to be the next victim, but in the sudden flight and

discretion of Malcolm and Donalbain, we also get a glimpse of the ultimate outcome, and in the final scene of the act are shown the instrument which is to bring it about. Macduff absents himself from Macbeth's coronation.

The third act of "Macbeth" is immensely interesting. In it the action moves more slowly. Macbeth has now one foot in the snare, and tragedy can take her time. We are shown with immense care and pains the effect of their act upon Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. And this effect is, at the first glance, surprising and unexpected, almost unaccountable. But, on a closer examination, it is strictly logical and consistent, and shows how the author allows no consideration to side-track him from his original intention. The tragedy is the tragedy of Macbeth, and Macbeth is the hero and the victim. Lady Macbeth, despite her prominence in the play, is only an accessory. Until the murder of Duncan she dominates Macbeth, but that fact accomplished, her purpose is fulfilled, and she gradually begins to break up. Macbeth, on the other hand, becomes firmer, more crafty, cunning, careful and cruel. The scene with the murderers is a masterpiece of contemptuous callousness. At the same time he is perhaps a little less of a coward and openly employs dirty workers, where before he might have been afraid to take the actual initiative of engaging them. But conspirators need accomplices, that is their weak spot, and Macbeth's accomplices fail him and bungle the Banquo murder, letting Fleance escape.

And so the tragedy is kept going and we are prepared for another act.

The gradual formation, or rather deformation of Macbeth's character, in the third act, is apparent.

Lady Macbeth is still there to supply fuel when necessary, and it is necessary when he is shaken by the appearance of Banquo's ghost. But by the end of the act his mind is made up. He will lean no more upon his wife. He will find things out for himself. He will consult with the devil.

The act closes with two short scenes that are extraordinarily interesting, and more important than one might at first think, that between Hecate and the witches, and that between Lennox and "another Lord". From the former it appears that the witches, like Mephistopheles in "Faustus," have anticipated orders with Macbeth, and been having a little frolic on their own account. And it also appears that Macbeth is not a genuine villain at all. He sins for his own ends, not for the mere pleasure of sinning. In short, he is no artist!

The other scene is a guarded conversation between two peers, from which we gather the condition of the Court from another point of view. Hitherto we have only seen it from the one—Macbeth's.

In Act IV the tragedy is, in one sense, completed. Macbeth's visit to the witches seals his doom. The witches have forged their instrument. The hideous birth is complete. Henceforward the firstlings of Macbeth's black heart will be the firstlings of his hand. And the firstlings are terrible, the murders of Lady Macduff and her children. This scene is often omitted in the representation of the tragedy, but it is absolutely essential to a proper realization of the horrible octopus whose clawing tentacles were beginning to reach out to the ends of Scotland. And, as already shown, enough is seen of Lady Macduff to show that her own little weakness is the indirect cause of her catastrophe. From

Scotland and this terrible scene, it is like getting a breath of fresh air to find oneself back in England, although we are to be present at a sad scene, the breaking of the terrible news to Macduff. But this dreadful blow settles the matter. Retribution unfolds her wings for Scotland, and a glimmer of light begins to pierce the gloom. "The night is long that never finds the day."

The whole of this last scene of the fourth act is as significant and important as it is tender and touching. Malcolm, the hope of Scotland, is seen to be a hope indeed, and Macduff a man with only one object in life, to bring about the consummation of that hope.

The fifth act opens with the final disposal of Lady Macbeth. We are shown her wandering blindly through the murky hell that she has made for herself. It is a dreadful scene, yet so beautifully written and contrived as to attract nothing but sympathy and pity for the distraught lady. The audience in the house takes its cue from the audience on the stage, and they, who know everything, are, or should be, as deeply moved as the good doctor and the gentlewoman who know nothing. The doctor's "God, God, forgive us all" finds echo in a fervent "Amen" in the hearts of any human audience, if the scene is anything like realized by the players.

The scenes that follow all show the inevitable hastening on of Macbeth's doom and his gradual awakening to the horrible nature of his delusion. He has brought everything off, yet nothing has, so to speak, come off. "King, Cawdor, Glamis," he has everything he wanted, that is to say, everything he thought he wanted; but the things he really wanted, "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," peace and happiness are not for him.

Yet he still has hope for his life, he still wants to live. Why, Heaven or Hell alone knows. He gives us his opinion of life. It is a "walking shadow," "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing".

Like many another before and after him, he is quite ready to class his own experience as "life". And he still listens to the idiot's talk, and pins his faith to those witches who have deceived him so thoroughly. A wood has got to march towards Dunsinane ere he can be slain by a man not born of woman.

And then a wood does come to Dunsinane, and he finds himself face to face with his enemy, a man untimely ripped from his mother's womb. It is all a hoax. There is nothing supernatural about it. It is as simple and natural as the egg of Columbus. The tragedy is complete. The bubble has burst. Macbeth realizes to the uttermost the full depths of his deception. There is nothing to be done now, bear-like he must fight his course to the end. Here, again, Shakespeare knows well where to stop, and does not "o'erstep the modesty of nature". Macbeth and Macduff "*exeunt* fighting". It would be absolutely impossible in any time or place to produce, with any conviction, the grisly combat which ended in the decapitation of Macbeth. Such a death is an illusion that cannot be created on the stage. Therefore Shakespeare leaves it to the imagination. And yet some producers have attempted to do it, and ignominiously failed, where the mighty author himself did not hope to succeed. Can inartistic ineptitude or fatuous vanity go farther? I have seen Macbeth lying dead on the stage with "twenty trenched gashes" in his *shield*, his stomach rising and falling six or seven inches with his breathless attempts at inspiration, and

a helmet stuck a-top of it looking for all the world like the dome on a bursting steam-engine!

"Macbeth" was followed by Shakespeare's stupendous tragedy, "King Lear," which was written in 1606 and first published two years later. "Lear" is, perhaps, the most appalling tragedy that the mind of man has conceived. Unlike Othello, Hamlet, or Macbeth, the victim has wittingly done nothing to court disaster. Hamlet sets out to reform and avenge, fully conscious of the usual fate of reformers and avengers. Othello must have known that he was taking a risk when he took Desdemona. Macbeth never deceived himself. But Lear, the "fond, foolish old King," only prepared for a happy and comfortable old age. The tragedy is utterly unexpected, a thunderbolt. No one expects such a fearful outcome, not even the audience (on the stage) who are more keen-witted than the poor old King. From what we have already seen of Goneril and Regan, we scarcely expect much. From their fulsome speeches, we expect sins of omission, but scarcely serious ones of commission. It is obvious that the King is not a very bright old gentleman, and they may be expected to take some advantage of him; but the fiendish ferocity and swiftness of their savage fury are almost as appalling to the audience as they are to the King.

King Lear is a study of the elements, of elemental passions and primitive wickedness. The scene and period are well chosen, England in the dark ages before the dawn of civilization. The subsidiary plot, the story of Gloucester and his two sons, is as malignantly horrible as the main story. The putting out of the Duke's eyes is as ghastly a scene as is known in drama. It is worse than the blinding of Œdipus, for there we do not see the actual operation.

Moreover, Œdipus's torture is self-inflicted and done with some kind of justification, but the wanton savagery and horror of Gloucester's is unspeakable.

The story of "King Lear" is taken mainly from Holinshed's "Chronicles," that of Gloucester and his sons from Sidney's "Arcadia," poor Tom's madness from another source. This welding together of these terrible incidents is a fine instance of Shakespeare's unerring powers of selection. The whole construction of "Lear" is faultless and demonstrates an absolute and complete mastery of art and craft. Shakespeare follows his usual precedent, except that the tragedy moves, if anything, more quickly than usual. The evil genius of the piece comes first on the scenes, then the victim, and then we at once get to work on the plot. And the first act does not end, as first acts so often do, with the laying of the plot. The cuckoo's egg is hatched and the hideous bird has made his appearance, and some of the birds have already been thrown out of the nest, ere the curtain descends on the first act. The kingdom is divided, Cordelia is banished, and Lear has already learnt how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. If these are the present fruits, what will the harvest be? The audience sit trembling in their seats whilst the lowering clouds gather. At the opening of Act II, the subsidiary plot is forwarded, and in the reception and "stocking" of Kent we get an ominously eloquent hint of things to come. It is a short act, less than half the length of the first, but by the time it is finished the utter inevitability of the catastrophe is evident. The poor, fond, foolish old King has obviously neither the power to avert it, nor the strength of character, body or anything else to withstand it, he can only rail at it, the most helpless, impotent, and hopeless thing

to do under any circumstances. Railing has no power to harm your opponent, whilst it certainly has power to arm him. Thus we see that the King can expect little real help from his friends, save that of loving companionship. Kent and the poor fool have hearts of gold, but these can do little against a head of feathers, save to attempt to control it. This, then, is the situation at the end of the second act. A poor, impotent, helpless old man, at an age when he has earned his rest, and loving hands should be gently ministering to his wants, is stripped of all that should give him warmth and thrust naked into the storm by the hands of those who should love him most.

The third act opens with a little break in the clouds. Shakespeare, mighty artist that he is, never loses sight of the end of a tragedy. There is division between Albany and Cornwall, concealed as yet, but still division, and through this rift in the clouds the sun may yet shine.

The stout-hearted Kent is the first to perceive the hint at a break and to take advantage of it. But this little gleam of sunshine, no bigger than a man's hand, is quickly hidden, and we are once more plunged into the storm. The scene on the heath is terrible beyond words. It is tragedy and pathos, with the pathos accentuated by the presence of the fool, who is not comic relief. After this dreadful outburst we get another fleeting glimpse of the breaking clouds, in the scene between Gloucester and Edmund, but alas! through the break comes not only sunshine, but that streak of forked lightning which is to strike Gloucester. Edmund's treachery is further revealed. After this glimpse we are back on the heath again. Lear is prevailed upon to take shelter within the hovel, and consents quite as

much to please the others as to please himself. Within this hovel is Edgar, the Malcolm of this play, the noble being upon whom is to devolve the duty of piecing together the broken fragments of Lear's kingdom. He is disguised as a madman. To the hovel also comes Gloucester, whose warm sympathy is the only beam of sunshine that has so far forced itself through the clouds. At the end of the third scene the whole party find shelter from the storm in the hovel. Then we get another little flash of the lightning of Edmund's malice. Then we are in the farmhouse whither Lear and his friends have been guided by Gloucester. There the poor King's wits completely desert him, and he has the illusion of the trial of Goneril and Regan, after which exhausted nature breaks down and the King goes to sleep, but not to rest. Gloucester comes with his warning and the King is again moved on. Little enough, this is all that Gloucester can do, and dearly he pays for it. He is, in his turn, betrayed by Edmund, and there follows the terrible scene where his eyes are put out by Cornwall, whose own servant rebels at his master's fiendish cruelty. The rebellion is paid for by the lives of both. Gloucester is thrust out blind into the world to "smell his way to Dover". The other two servants, wiser in their generation, follow the old earl, bind up his wounds, and hand him over to the tender care of poor Tom of Bedlam, his own loyal, legitimate son Edgar, in disguise.

So ends the terrible third act, resembling in its tempestuous fury, lightning flashes of treachery and occasional gleams of what is behind the clouds, nothing so much as the storm that rages throughout it. This act is a masterly piece of construction and forwards the tragedy immensely, and we are left at the close of it

with all the material for another. There is no doubt as to how it will be possible to prolong the agony. "Lear" is not spun out.

In writing "Lear" Shakespeare must have kept the ideal of tragedy very sternly before him, otherwise he might conceivably have been tempted to patch the play up and end it on the fourth act, which offers every facility for a conventional happy ending, but it is only the last dying flicker of hope. The act opens with the pathetic reunion of Gloucester and his son, then come the important scenes between Edmund and Goneril, and the Duke of Albany and Cornwall. We get a glimpse into Albany's character and see the beginning of the end of the tragedy, and also get a further glimpse into the double-dealing and treachery of Edmund, and realize what a foul hotbed Lear's court had become, even before the opening of the tragedy. It is as well we did not know so much about this before; otherwise the interest of the opening act would have suffered.

We are then shown how matters are progressing in the French camp, and that Kent's plans are working exceedingly well, but the scene contains one ominous sign. The King of France, of whose strong character we had seen something in the first act, is removed from the scene. In the coming fight Cordelia and her forces will be taken at a disadvantage. In the unique scenes that follow, this small fact may escape notice, but it is a very important one all the same, and presages a continuance of the tragedy. After being shown the weak places in the friendly camp, we are shown the widening breaches in the hostile one. Intrigues and counter-intrigues take place, and the go-between, Oswald, is dispatched upon what is to be his last errand of "mercenary". Then come the wonderful scenes

between Edgar and Gloucester, and Lear, Edgar and Gloucester. The encounter with the mad yet terribly sane King on the cliff-head has probably never been acted exactly as it is written, since Shakespeare's day, but perhaps the time when it will be again is not far off. There follows the scene with Oswald, and Edgar's splendid assumption of dialect. What an actor he must have been, he deceived everybody! Oswald is again dispatched, this time with a sword-thrust. His letter is opened, and Edgar comes into possession of all the facts. Things are still improving for the outcasts. The last scene of this act is perhaps the most tender and touching in all Shakespeare, if not in all the world's drama. One can think of nothing to equal it, not even the farewell of Œdipus to his children and his brothers, where one's sympathy is a little estranged by the self-righteous, self-condemnatory, and thoroughly unjust attitude of Œdipus and the thing he stands for. But with Lear it is different. His estimate of himself is perfectly just. He is a fond, foolish old man. This meeting with his long-estranged daughter is inexpressibly sad and moving, but surely it is the last, and the King has drained utterly to the dregs his cup of sorrow? We shall see.

The last act is very short and very appalling, Albany vacillates and hesitates until it is too late. Edmund's repentance comes too late to save Cordelia and prevent the mischief already set afoot. The entrance of the King, carrying the body of Cordelia, is the most terrible knell in tragedy, the moving pathos of his death beside her dead body too deep for words, his mysterious last words seem scarcely spoken to or of the dead Cordelia. It is all over now, the tragedy is finished. Of the sufferers only Kent and Edgar remain. Kent has re-

ceived his call and will shortly follow his old master, and Edgar, the silver cord which has been woven unbroken through this tragic design, will reign and reweld the broken fragments of the kingdom.

As a piece of construction, "Lear" follows very much the lines of "Richard III," "Romeo and Juliet," or "The Merchant of Venice". It takes place, so to speak, in two camps, and we are continually jumping from one to the other. But this jumping is never awkward and never tiring or irritating. Shakespeare works out this tremendous drama with almost divine economy. There is not one character too many, or one too few. No one character does the work obviously intended for another, as is so frequently seen in bad melodrama, where they have hundreds of characters. But all the same "Lear" is in one sense a melodrama, that is to say, a primitive drama, portraying primitive, or perhaps one should say, elementary passions. Hence the characterization is somewhat sharply contrasted in blacks and whites. Edmund, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Oswald are of the deepest black, without a speck of even grey. Cordelia and Kent are white. Lear himself, Albany and Gloucester might be termed grey. Perhaps the most remarkable and interesting character in the play is Edgar. He is not, dramatically, so effective as Lear; but I find him much more interesting, just as I find Antonio more interesting than Shylock.

Edgar is one of those splendid secondary characters in which Shakespeare abounds, who are to play a principal part in the next move in the game on the particular chess-board to which they belong. Malcolm and Horatio are two such characters. Great care is taken in every case to show us what manner of men

they are. Horatio is revealed to us in "Hamlet" (Act III, Scene 2), Malcolm in "Macbeth" (IV, 3). Of Edgar we see more. He is not revealed in any one particular scene, nor by his own or anyone else's actual word of mouth. His actions alone are given to us to judge him by. He is certainly prompt to take action, and discreet with the discretion that is genuinely the better part of valour. The nature of his methods proves his valour. Poor Tom is a-cold. Though pretending to be mad he is not by any means pretending to be cold or to suffer. He shows wonderful wisdom, tenderness and strength of character. He lies very low, but it is not for the sake of his own skin. He never falters. And his reward is that he is eventually able to close his poor old father's eyeless lids in death, to save the remnants of the situation and do some good in this maelstrom of terror and wickedness. Is there not something akin to Hamlet's in his pretended madness? But Edgar is more independent. The tragedy does not strike so near home. He can put his "antic disposition" on or off at will. There is no fear of its becoming a Nessus-shirt. Edgar is the antidote to Lear, the direct opposite. Lear is just what he describes himself to be, a fond, foolish old man. Almost entirely devoid of any wisdom, foresight or insight, he is fond of his daughters, but apparently still more fond of their affection. He is like a lovesick, importunate girl, to whom words mean more than acts. To a certain extent he deserves what he gets, but that makes the tragedy none the less painful and none the less human. Whatever the crime, and here there is no crime, would one flog an old man as one might a young one? One of the most terrible things in the tragedy is the utter lack of respect or tenderness for Lear's white hairs.

Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?

"Lear" is *a* tragedy of old age, not *the* tragedy of it, as some say. It represents an extreme case. Perhaps all parents have got to learn how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. But there is this much to be said for the child. It would be more thankful if it knew, but it does not know. The thousand and one sacrifices, sufferings, and self-denials that the parent makes for the child are perforce hidden from it, until it becomes a parent in its turn, and weeps hot tears at the thought of its own callous youth. For one generation to understand another seems impossible, but there is surely no reason why they cannot respect each other, and appreciate each other's point of view.

It is not merely the lack of respect that makes the tragedy of Lear, but the presence of utter, wanton, callous, inconceivable cruelty, against which he can do nothing. His friends do their best for him. They offer him shelter from the storm without, but he wants it from the storm within. He asks for bread. They give him a stone. It is all they have to give, and he is obedient and even grateful, for he is quite a good, kind old man. From first to last that is about all that can be said of Lear. He is a kind, good, not particularly bright old man. He is painfully and bitterly surprised and deceived, where, had he been a little more intelligent, perhaps a little less vain, he might not have been either.

Of Cornwall and Edmund nothing can be said, except that they are criminals, villains of the deepest dye. Edmund is the more subtle. Where others are merely callous and cruel, he is actively contriving and

taking a keen interest in his villainy for its own sake. He has the strong veins of superstition and egotism often observed in criminals, and his belief in his horoscope means more to him than he pretends it does.

He makes a good pendant to Iago, and does very much more mischief. There is indeed a strong touch of Iago about him. His father, the Duke of Gloucester, is a gentleman and a sportsman, who does not seek to excuse himself, and bears manfully his awful punishment, a punishment out of all proportion to the offence. Albany is a vacillating character, but he is placed in a terrible position and perhaps does the best that could be expected under the circumstances. Kent, like Edgar, is pure gold. He is actuated by the highest sense of love and loyalty to his old master, whom he will follow to the grave, and beyond it. He has something of the spirit of Old Japan.

The Fool is the Fool. He knows his business and does it, and he is introduced into the play for the sake of his office rather than his character, but all the same we get a touching glimpse of a loyal, devoted servant. The fools in Shakespeare are very significant characters. It was a significant office. Under cover of his own folly, a fool was permitted to reveal the King's to the King. Wise Kings listened to their fools, foolish ones laughed at them, wicked ones tortured them. Lear seems to have ignored his, but he was unconscious of anything outside himself and his troubles.

There are only three women in the play, Lear's daughters. The first two may be dismissed in a very few words. They are black-hearted, sexless adulteresses, murderesses, and worse. Lady Macbeth is a dove compared to them, a model of domesticity, housewifery, and wifely devotion. One trembles to think where they got

their villainy from. Lear is evidently a widower. Madam is never mentioned—a fact for which there is probably good reason. Cordelia probably takes after her father. She is one of Shakespeare's greatest heroines. We see very little of her, but enough to see that she too is pure gold. A little wanting in tact, perhaps. A crumb or two thrown to feed her father's vanity, in the first place, might have eased the situation a little. These distressingly truthful and candid folk bring about terrible crashes, but perhaps they are right in the long run.

After the gigantic effort of "Lear," Shakespeare seems to have rested a little, his rest taking the form of collaboration. The next play, "Timon of Athens," bears obvious traces of other hands, but equally obvious ones, especially in the characters of Timon and Apemantus, of Shakespeare's. Timon is a smug, superior, self-satisfied nobleman of Athens. He is continually giving large feasts and dinner-parties, when he figures as a gracious and generous host—generous, be it added, before he is just. For one day his steward comes along with the books and shows Timon to be worse than bankrupt. He has been living much beyond his means. But no matter, he will send out into the byways and hedges, and those friends whom he has so often helped in their troubles will come to him in his. But needless to say, they do not, and Timon retires to the woods and becomes a misanthrope. Digging in the woods he turns up a nugget, of which he refuses to avail himself. But his friends, and his enemies also, get to hear of it, but they come away empty-handed and sore-backed when they go to see it. Timon first lashes them with words, then thrashes them with cudgels. Eventually he dies, and buries himself in a sarcophagus of his own making,

with a suitable inscription, warning all and sundry to pass him by. Nobody is a penny the worse for his death, and probably many people many pennies the better, for they would not be likely to leave his gold as undisturbed as his coffin. He is a poor creature, never looking within when the crash comes. His generosity and lavishness are obviously all a blind, done quite as much for his own sake as for his friends'. Timon of Athens and Simon of Galilee are first cousins.

The two other most interesting characters are his faithful steward Flavius and Apemantus, a churlish philosopher, who fills the unpleasant, but necessary post of skeleton at Timon's feasts.

The play is slight and hastily strung together, but there are unmistakable Shakespearean touches in it.

"Timon of Athens" was followed by "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," another play of which Shakespeare was only part author. It is a poor, loose-jointed affair and is chiefly interesting because it foreshadows to some extent the course in which Shakespeare's mind was to run in his last three plays. Moreover it contains at least one immortal phrase, "The music of the spheres". As a play it is quite unproducible, on many grounds. The coarse scenes which take place in and around a brothel are usually attributed to hands other than Shakespeare's, and generally merely upon the grounds of their coarseness. But obviously this does not follow. Shakespeare could be coarse with the worst of them, just as surely as he could go to the other extreme with, and beyond, the best of them. The same hand could have written and probably did write the disgusting scenes in the brothel between Bawd and Boult as wrote the fine scene between Marina and Lysimachus, where Marina's stern purity and dignified refinement light up

that unsavoury place, as effectually as they save the soul of Lysimachus.

What is hard to understand is the fact that the same hand was able to turn so quickly from the tremendous tragedies of Macbeth and Lear to the comparative trivialities of Timon and Pericles. The truth possibly is that Shakespeare, after his two supreme efforts, threw off the other two plays as he would an old coat, because he was asked to, and it was his business to do so. He was a practical work-a-day dramatist, attached to a theatre, and although his exceptional abilities and industry had made him part manager, he had to attend to his business as regularly and conscientiously as a modern actor-manager, be he ever so great, must attend rehearsals.

"Timon of Athens" and "Pericles" form a gaudy, flimsy, tawdry little bridge, which leads from the two last great tragedies to the two last great histories, "Antony and Cleopatra" and "Coriolanus". Both plays are taken bodily and boldly from Plutarch, who is adhered to very literally, in places even textually, until the moment comes when he can be considerably improved upon dramatically.

The first play is a duet, the second a solo. The story of "Antony and Cleopatra" is too well known to need any repetition or recapitulation. It obviously offers a fine chance to a dramatist, and a chance of which *the* dramatist made the most. In his turn he gives a great opportunity to an actress. An opportunity of which, so far as I know, no actress has yet made the most. But perhaps that is scarcely her fault. Nature has probably not done her share of the work so far. There have been many Cleopatras whose art was more convincing than their beauty, others whose beauty was more convincing

than their art. Should the happy day come when the one is equal to the other and the other to the one, each to each, and both are equal to the occasion, I ask nothing better, or worse, than to go, see, and be conquered!

It seems impossible to give higher praise to Shakespeare than to say that he made the most of this glorious opportunity. His Cleopatra, with her vapours, for she has them like any early Victorian miss, her loves, her jealousies, her bewildering changes of mind and of front, in fact her whole paraphernalia of femininities, frivolities, and fripperies, backed up with immense abilities and a characteristically feminine capacity to rise to a great occasion at the last, is an immortal and surely truthful record of Egypt's great Queen, and Antony's serpent of Old Nile.

Antony is equally successful. There is something very pathetic in this picture of a great man in his great fall. Somehow one feels that when he hoisted sail and fled in the wake of Cleopatra from the sea fight, leaving his companions and his country in the lurch, that there is something manly in the act. He was a royal lover. And to do her justice, Cleopatra realized what manner of man she had conquered when she followed him to the grave. The well-meant efforts to patch things up for Antony at home were crude, and the marriage to Octavia almost ignoble. One cannot imagine the lady consenting, for a moment, to such an arrangement, except that it seems to have been the duty of a Roman matron to be seen and not heard.

Of the other characters in the play the most interesting and original is undoubtedly Enobarbus, the practical old soldier into whose mouth Shakespeare put the incomparable description of Antony's first meeting with his charmer. Enobarbus is a sort of allotropic modi-

fication of a type, common, comforting and compensating in many of Shakespeare's plays. He belongs to the same category as Banquo, Horatio, Kent, Menenius. His final "ratting" is a sad stain on his escutcheon. At the same time we must not judge him too hardly, for even he, though he appreciated it better than most, never fully understood the power by which "Antonio had become bound"!

Whenever the story of Antony and Cleopatra is enacted, so will be that of her gentle maids of honour, Iras and Charmian, into whom, as into their beloved mistress, Shakespeare has breathed the breath of life.

From this great duet of passion, with a faint *obbligato* of duty, Shakespeare passed to another historical tragedy of old Rome, namely "Coriolanus". As a play "Coriolanus" is remarkable for the singleness of its dramatic interest. It is practically concerned with one man, and one characteristic of that man. "Coriolanus" is the play, the intense superiority of Coriolanus the pivot of the play, and the jealous inferiority of his compatriots the wind which turns the play upon the pivot. Coriolanus's valour and feats of arms are the only other characteristics of which we hear much, and which are necessary in order to place him on the proper pedestal, from whence he can exhibit his pride to the multitude.

The story of Coriolanus offers a fine opportunity to the dramatist, of which Shakespeare avails himself as usual to the utmost. The Plutarchian story is followed even more literally than in Antony and Cleopatra, but it is filled out with truly Shakespearean original incident, character, and humour. The sage old Menenius is a very Shakespearean production; so are the three women, Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria. Volumnia must be a typical great lady of Rome, self-reliant and proud, well

aware of what is due to her own rank and position, and also to those beneath her. Virgilia is, apparently, the Roman's idea of a dutiful wife. He must have been easy to please and difficult to love. Valeria is a friend of the family, a merry gossip, beautifully touched in, who shows us that Roman ladies were not all marble statues.

There is plenty of movement and action in "Coriolanus". Events move quickly and the dramatic interest accumulates. The play is curiously local, with a parochial, even domestic interest. To a student of Rome or of the drama it will always appeal, but it lacks the broad humanity of "Julius Cæsar" or "Antony and Cleopatra". It is an austere subject austerely treated, but, being Shakespeare, it is, of course, not without the touches of nature that make the whole world kin.

We now come to the final period of Shakespeare's life's work. The three last plays that he wrote single-handed were "Cymbeline," "A Winter's Tale," and "The Tempest". There are other plays, notably "The Two Noble Kinsmen" and "Henry VIII," of which it is known that he was part author, but the three that we have mentioned are, with the exception of one or two "improvements" by later vandals, entirely his own work. The plays, which may perhaps be best described as contemplative comedies, are distinguished by calm maturity of thought and style, and extraordinary mastery of technique.

Shakespeare had reached the stage where he could not go wrong. He could obey or disobey all recognized laws at will. He was a law unto himself and possessed the free hand of an absolute master.

The plays are furthermore distinguished and graced

by four exquisite specimens of womanhood and girlhood, Imogen and Hermione, Perdita and Miranda. These four graces form a beautiful climax to Shakespeare's long gallery of gentle womanhood. If ever the women of the world raise a monument to Shakespeare as high as that which he has raised to them, it will reach to Heaven!

The first of these comedies appears to have been "Cymbeline," which was probably first produced in 1609 or 1610.

Shakespeare compounded the story from his small but select library of books in the old sweet way. Holinshed and Boccaccio were principally laid under contribution. From the former came the story of Cymbeline, from the latter that of Imogen, who figures as Ginevra in the "Decameron".

The play might, with advantage, have been called "Imogen," as she figures very much more prominently and pleasantly than Cymbeline. But Cymbeline is the cause of all the trouble. He does what many men have done before and since. He adopts a young man, Posthumus, and trains him up in the way that he should go, according to his (Cymbeline's) own ideas, and then is surprised and hurt that the young man expects to get the full advantage of that training.

The story of the attempted seduction of Imogen by Iachimo, which might be very ugly, is, like that of Marina and Lysimachus, purified by the fragrant presence of the heroine. The construction of the play is, as usual, simple and spontaneous, events move straightforwardly and rapidly, although the author stops to pick the flowers by the way. The characterization is consummate. Cymbeline feels his position, as a King, rather too acutely. His Queen, I think, must have

been closely related to Goneril and Regan. Cloten the villain, Iachimo the semi-villain, and Posthumus, who is only a semi-hero, are all splendidly effective. So is Pisanio, the faithful servant of his lord and lady, Posthumus and Imogen. The story of the banished Belarius and his two foster-sons, is unmitigated Shakespeare, that is to say, it is not directly traceable to any source outside of the play. But Belarius has his prototype, and his story its counterpart in other plays of Shakespeare.

To banish a delightful person to an equally delightful spot is a favourite device of which he and we never grow tired. Had the plays been written by Bacon, and he been caught doing it and given his choice of a punishment, it would assuredly have been banishment!

The scene of Cymbeline is laid in Britain, before the Christian era, but the era of the play is the Shakespearean era, neither more nor less, an era with plenty of historical anachronisms. Sir Sidney Lee has pointed out how some of the characters talk Calvinism, but there are no false quantities, as far as human nature is concerned.

Mention must be made of the immortal lyric "Fear no more the heat o' the sun," which, unlike many other Shakespearean lyrics, maintains the same high standard from the first line to the last. There is none of that disappointing tailing off which seems almost a characteristic of many.

"Cymbeline" was followed by "A Winter's Tale," a play that has been well described as a tragi-comedy. Like "Cymbeline," it is characterized by extraordinary facility of execution. Again Shakespeare cannot go wrong. He deals with a difficult situation with the most consummate care and convincing simplicity. The

play is divided into two halves, with a sixteen years' gap between the two. A lot of inconvenient characters have to be conveniently got rid of at the close of the first period, a difficult problem for the ordinary conscientious student.

But the master, apparently, did not think twice about that. There is only one kind of thing that can bring about what he wants, and that is a catastrophe; so he organizes one, puts all his characters aboard a ship and sinks it, in the good old pantomime style. The sole survivor is the little few months' old baby Perdita, and her guardian Antigonus, who survives just long enough to leave the baby on the shore, and then gets eaten by a bear! And there is no reason why he should not be, and a very good reason why he should. He has to be got rid of somehow. A bad, uninspired dramatist would have done it anyhow, a super-conscientious, serious-minded student of the drama nohow, but the incomparable Shakespeare unhesitatingly does it in a vivid, surprising, picturesque, semi-comic and semi-tragic method, thoroughly in keeping with the rest of the play. Improbable, perhaps, but not impossible. The improbable often makes a good situation, the impossible never; and Shakespeare never, wittingly, uses it. His characters *never* do what they are incapable of doing. His mortals are mortal, his immortals immortal, Prospero is Prospero. In putting a shipwreck upon the sea-coast of Bohemia, he appears to have achieved the impossible, but he erred through ignorance, an ignorance passed on to him, it would seem, by his fellow-dramatist, and erstwhile and outstripped rival Greene, upon whose romance of "Pandosto" Shakespeare based his play, thus conferring a sort of second-hand immortality upon a would-be rival.

The outstanding glories of "A Winter's Tale" are of course Hermione and Perdita. We have often had occasion to refer to Shakespeare's peerless heroines, but to give us two in one play, and they a mother and a daughter, is indeed a divine lavishness.

The scene of the restoration of Hermione to the chastened Leontes, at the end of the play, is as touching and moving as the gentle love-scenes between Florizel and Perdita are idyllic and beautiful. The other characters of the play are mainly variations of those Shakespearean types which "age cannot wither nor custom stale," with the exception of Leontes, who occupies a niche all by himself, and seems to have no counterpart in any other play. He is a jealous, insane scoundrel, there are no other words for it, and the sole reason that he has the good fortune to be married to such an one as Hermione, is probably because they are royalties, and the marriage was arranged. They do not understand one another in the least; his worthlessness is as incomprehensible to her as her worth is to him. It is really fortunate for her sake that the crash comes, and she is relieved of the monster until he is chastened and more fit to come near her. Camillo is another member of the healthy Menenius tribe. Paulina is a superior Amelia, who, had she been in Amelia's place, would not have been too late. She knows when and how to act. The pairing off of her and Camillo, at the end of the play, is generally regarded as a concession to Elizabethan dramatic conventions, but I cannot help feeling that Shakespeare thoroughly enjoyed making the match. They are a delicious couple. Autolycus is, of course, a sheer joy, an unconsidered trifle who must have been at once snapped up by the first audience that saw him, and has been the joy of every audience since.

The sheep-shearing scenes are, as Mr. Granville Barker says, "pure Warwickshire".

After "A Winter's Tale" came "The Tempest," which seems to have been the latest completed play, and in some respects it is the greatest. It is worthy of being Shakespeare's swan song. It is thought by many to contain autobiographical significance. They have discovered in Prospero the counterpart of the great dramatist himself, who in this play lays down his wizard's wand. It may have been so, consciously or unconsciously on the poet's part, but for the moment we are not so much concerned with the dramatist as with the drama. It almost seems as though Shakespeare, having exhausted the book of nature, has turned to the book of super-nature. He has ranged the gamut of emotions, passions, ambitions, desires, temptations, from the highest to the lowest, and the whole panorama of human nature has been paraded before our eyes, and now he brings a character almost from another world, or, to be more exact, a character *to* another world.

Prospero is the greatest man, the greatest King, that Shakespeare ever drew. His dominion extends beyond the confines of this world, and he is lord over the winds and the waves. His familiar spirit Ariel, although sometimes referred to as "he," seems neither man nor woman. She is counterbalanced by the horrible Caliban, neither man nor animal, fish, fowl, nor good red-herring.

Of Miranda one cannot speak more highly than to say that she is full worthy of the place she adorns, the last and perhaps sweetest of Shakespeare's heroines, and Ferdinand is worthy of her. Of the remaining characters the best is Gonzalo, another of the tribe of Menenius and Camillo. Trinculo, Stephano, Alonso, Sebastian and the rest are all well-worn Shakespearean

types. The opening scene of the wreck in which the unfortunate skipper is harassed and impeded by his distinguished passengers, seems so like the real thing that I suppose many will insist upon it that Shakespeare was once shipwrecked.

But the play depends neither upon plot, passion, nor person, unless it is upon the character of Prospero, for the unique and high place that it holds in the Shakespearean gallery. It owes this to the exquisite lyrics, the beautiful poetry and the deep solemnity of the thought expressed.

Prospero's farewell speeches to his art are among the finest in all Shakespeare, and they are none the less beautiful for not being tinged with the human wrack and woe of Macbeth's or Cardinal Wolsey's farewells. There is no sadness of farewell when Prospero embarks. His work is finished and it has been well done.

The priceless lyrics, "Where the bee sucks" and "Full fathom five thy father lies," are even more familiar than the play itself.

True to his old methods, Shakespeare selected rather than invented the principal plot and incidents, and his senses were, as usual, wide awake to make any possible capital out of current events. The books that were laid under contribution were Florio's translation of Montaigne and Golding's translation of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," both old favourites of Shakespeare's, and certain pamphlets and booklets relating to the discovery of the Bermudas or "Ile of Divels," with which Prospero's island has very reasonably been identified.

After completing "The Tempest" Shakespeare practically retired altogether into private life, and all we hear of him is the fact that he has become a prominent, indeed the most prominent, resident of Strat-

ford-on-Avon, and occasionally goes up to town on business connected with the Globe Theatre, in which he still has a share, or to speculate in a little property purchasing. Occasionally too he still puts his pen at the disposal of the theatre in retouching some old play, or pulling together some new one. The principal of these was "Henry VIII," which he is believed to have written in collaboration with John Fletcher. The probability is that Fletcher did all the spade work, whilst Shakespeare defined the general lines upon which the play was to be done, and pulled together certain scenes, which bear unmistakable signs of his handiwork.

The principal one of them is, of course, the downfall of Wolsey, but this is not so much pure Shakespeare as vastly improved Fletcher, in fact Fletcher improved beyond recognition. The hands are the hands of Esau, but the voice is the voice of Jacob!

The Shakespearean hand is also traceable in the banqueting scene, the execution of Buckingham, the death of Catherine of Aragon and the great trial scene. The play is generally regarded as little more than an historical pageant, but it is a better play than one realizes at first. The present writer had the extreme pleasure and honour of figuring in a long and successful run of several hundred nights. The play never palled, but stood the test of a thing of beauty. The many-sided character of Henry VIII is splendidly brought out, hiding under his bluff bonhomie a hideous subtle villainy, and is finely contrasted with Wolsey's arrogant humility. The central point of the play, the moment in the trial scene where the King defies Rome and the whole consistory of cardinals, is splendidly dramatic. He seems suddenly to wake to the fact that Rome has nothing he has not got, her power is just as temporal and earthly

as his own is, and his temporal power he will share with no one. I cannot help feeling that Shakespeare suggested the general lines of the play. Fletcher wrote it and then Shakespeare touched it up. There are many things that suggest that this was the plan adopted. Whether that was so or not, "Henry VIII" seems certainly to have been the last play with which Shakespeare had anything to do, and it was also, appropriately enough, the last piece that was played at the old Globe Theatre, for on 29 June, 1613, the famous old playhouse was burnt to the ground. "Henry VIII" was produced with great lavishness, and the fire was caused by a spark from one of the cannon which were fired off to announce the entry of the King to the Masque at Hampton Court. With the old theatre there probably perished what, had they been preserved, would now be the most priceless possessions in the world's dramatic literature, Shakespeare's prompt copies and possibly his library. It is an infinite tragedy that there seems to have been no one at hand sufficiently awake to rescue these precious relics for posterity.

The great author did not very long survive his theatre; for nearly three years later, on Tuesday, 23 April, he died at the age of fifty-two and was laid to rest in the chancel of Stratford church. Nearly all the time in the interim between his retirement and death he had lived at Stratford, becoming a person of great importance in the town, and, as we have seen, occasionally visiting London on business, and looking up his old friends, but they more often visited him. Indeed, his death is said to have been brought about by his being too convivial in his entertainment of his old friends and cronies, Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton.

Upon his tomb were carved the well-known lines:—

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbeare
To digg ye dust enclosed heare.
Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones,
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

Some doubt has been expressed as to whether Shakespeare was really the author of this somewhat simple epitaph and somewhat poor poetry. But he could write doggerel with the best, or the worst, of them. Moreover, these lines served a purpose and were purposely simple. The poet who had earned, by such strenuous labours, the right to be buried in this place, was not the man to let himself be disinterred and moved into the charnel-house, to make way for some one else. To prevent this he adopted the simple but effective method of a little poetry and a little curse, obviously designed to appeal to the lesser intellects of sextons and clerks. Nor was he, with his magnificent sense of proportion, and unobtrusive impersonality, the man to write elaborate epitaphs on himself. His death did not by any means pass unnoticed, and the most eminent contemporary writers recorded their opinion that he should have been buried in Westminster Abbey. His wife survived him by seven years, and was buried near him in the chancel of Stratford church. His last surviving descendant, Lady Barnard, daughter of Mrs. Hall *née* Susanna Shakespeare, died in 1670.

By his will Shakespeare had made Mrs. Hall his heiress, the sole bequest to his wife being his second-best bedstead. This is held by some to prove that, though reunited, Shakespeare and his wife were by no means one, but it does not by any means follow, as Mrs. Shakespeare was an ignorant, illiterate woman, advancing in years, and not nearly so capable of bearing the burden of the now considerable estate as was

Susanna Hall, who seems to have been quite an exceptional woman, inheriting some of her father's wit and wisdom.

Shakespeare's will is a curious, prosaic, practical document, of which much capital is made by some folk who apparently consider that the great author of the plays should have drawn it up in blank verse. But it is consistent with, and characteristic of the meek and humble, and unself-conscious disposition of this mighty genius, who seems never to have regarded himself or his work as of any real importance or interest to anybody but himself. So passed this stupendous being, the supreme glory of literature, and one of the miracles of the world.

To attempt, within the limits of a single paper, to give anything like an adequate or exhaustive criticism of the work of William Shakespeare, even given the ability to do such a thing, were to attempt the impossible. But there is one point exceptionally interesting and illuminating to a student of the drama, that one would like to touch upon.

One of the first, and, to my mind, most important facts is that Shakespeare was, before all things, a *practical dramatist*, a working man whose first business was to make his plays producible, playable and payable! I do not believe, for one moment, that these plays were the recreations of a genius, however mighty, written in his hours of ease. They are the work of a man who, great genius as he was, knew his own business and minded it. He was no Jack-of-all-trades, or if he was, he was also master of one, and that was play-writing.

A study of the conditions of the stage in Shakespeare's day, coupled with a study of his plays, reveals a wonderful ability for making the most, not only of the advan-

tages, but also of the disadvantages of the time. There was no scenery, therefore Shakespeare was not hampered by scene-painters', stage-carpenters', or scene-shifters' bills or disabilities. He could roam where he would as far as scenery was concerned, and his matchless descriptions drew all his audiences after him. They realized them for themselves. Now the scenic artist realizes the description for them. The scene is spread before their eyes, and the descriptions become not only unnecessary, but generally untrue. Description or scenery has got to go, and to our shame be it said, it is generally the description.

We prefer scenic illusion to poetic transportation. In defending this state of things it has been said that were Shakespeare writing plays to-day, he would take every advantage of modern stage contrivances. No doubt he would, he was far too practical a man to do otherwise. We can only be very thankful that he came when he did, at the right time, which is the time when miracles generally do come. But, in any case, the remark is beside the point, because Shakespeare did not write his plays to-day, and to present them under different conditions from those for which they were written, means their mutilation. It is argued that if there were no elaborate *mise en scène,* no one would go to see Shakespeare. Perhaps it would be better for Shakespeare and better for them if they stayed away. Some churches attract large congregations by their exquisite music, who go home after the service at peace with themselves and the world because they have just been to church, when they have really only been to a concert.

I believe that more than enough money has already been subscribed to the National Shakespeare Memorial, to build an exact copy of the old Globe Theatre, the

round O, and endow it in perpetuity. Could not such a thing be done?

However, the object of this paper is not to point out what Shakespeare's admirers could do, or should do, but what Shakespeare himself did. We have seen how he took advantage of one disadvantage. Another one was the scarcity of women, or rather of boys who could play women's parts. Hence the number of female speaking parts in his plays is, in nearly every instance, limited to five or less than five. He was better off as regards men, but it will be noticed that he is not really lavish with them compared to many of his contemporaries, and even they become fewer as time goes on; fewer in number and greater in performance. I believe a careful study of Shakespeare's casts would give us a very good idea of his companies. Had he a very fat comedian in early days, and were too wonderful twin boys at one time members of the company? I wonder.

There was probably attached to the Globe Theatre a very large library of old plays, to which Shakespeare perhaps added a small but select library of useful books.

In spite of what is so often maintained, it appears that there is no evidence in the plays of any very wide knowledge of books. The sources of the different plays and plots have now been objects of research for two or three centuries with no very startling results as far as the size of Shakespeare's library is concerned, but immensely startling ones as regards his intellect and artistic ability, for he was an artist with all the ability of the artist to create an illusion, and the knavery to create a false one. By carefully sticking to what he knows and putting that in its right place, the artist produces the impression that he knows *all* about his subject, and Shakespeare is no exception to this rule; in fact he is,

perhaps, the greatest example of it. When it was essential to the situation in his play to be accurate he was so, as in his knowledge of Venetian law in the "Merchant of Venice". Otherwise he did not trouble himself much, and fell into the same errors as contemporary writers and dramatists, sending ships into Bohemia and putting Lydia on the wrong bank of the Tiber. Shakespeare's knowledge of the law is one of the mysteries, and a favourite point with Baconians, but Spenser's legal knowledge is equally wonderful and mysterious. Moreover, it is an authenticated fact that William Shakespeare of Stratford had a strong turn for litigation, and when a man with a mind like Shakespeare's takes a fancy to a thing surprising results are likely to follow.

But if Shakespeare made much of his opportunities inside the theatre, he made still more of those outside. There never was a being more wide-awake, all eyes and ears as far as the drama was concerned, and this very faculty is probably at the root of the mystery, for whilst other geniuses were busy giving out their opinions *to* all and sundry, Shakespeare was probably absorbing *from* all and sundry. As Sir Sidney Lee has pointed out, his mind was like a highly sensitized photographic plate, receiving impressions with lightning-like rapidity, which impressions were afterwards to be developed and fixed for all time. The stage is perhaps the only one profession that could give an insight into all classes and grades of society, from the throne to the tavern, and to that profession Shakespeare belonged. He was frequently accustomed to be about the Court, hence his knowledge of Courts, and Court etiquette, which, by the way, is not nearly so wonderful or so exclusive as some folk are fond of asserting. His Kings and Queens are generally shown in their more informal moments, when

they have either doffed the crown, or only just donned it. What Shakespeare knew was the human heart, knew its desperate wickedness, weakness, and weariness, but he also knew the other side of the picture, its largeness, and gentleness, and sensitiveness. Shakespeare was a miracle, an inspiration, a man with the gift of tongues. The attempt to dethrone him and set human learning up in his place is, at its best, due to ignorance; ignorance of the history of literature, ignorance of art, and of the ways of artists; at its worst it is due to a deep-rooted jealousy in human nature that has always stoned and crucified inspired prophets and seers. Those who start with the assumption that William Shakespeare did not and could not write the plays, would do the world and themselves more good if they assumed, in the first place, that he did and could. There are good grounds for the assumption. His friends all thought him quite capable of it, and they were good judges. We have, at least, as much evidence to prove this as to prove that he was the drunken clown that some make out.

> Who steals my purse, steals trash; . . .
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
> But he that filches from me my good name,
> Robs me of that which not enriches him,
> And makes me poor indeed.

All that is known of William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon, and of William Shakespeare the player, and there is very much more known than many imagine, points to his having been the kind of being that one would expect the great author to be. His utter absence of self-consciousness, his amiability and common sense, the fact that he is never mentioned by any of his contemporaries except in terms of wonder at his marvellous wit. Bacon was a pedant and no sportsman. Shake-

speare was obviously a sportsman and no pedant. However, this paper is not controversial, but critical; the attempt of a student of the drama to glean something useful by taking a bird's-eye view of the whole work of the greatest dramatist of all time. I trust I have succeeded.

WILLIAM CONGREVE.

1670-1729.

WILLIAM CONGREVE was born in 1670 in Yorkshire, at Bardsey, near Leeds. He came of an old Staffordshire family. His grandfather had distinguished himself greatly as a cavalier officer, and had been set down after the Restoration for the order of the Royal Oak; his father was offered, and accepted, a good position as a land agent in Ireland, whither he went to live soon after the future dramatist was born. So the young Congreve was educated in Ireland, first at a school in Kilkenny and afterwards at Trinity College, Dublin, where Dean Swift was one of his fellow-students. After he had finished his education there, he was sent to London to study law, and with that object entered the Middle Temple. There, like many another young student before and after him, he concerned himself very little with the law, but very much with literature and society. These were the two strings that pulled him, and, according to the notions prevalent in those days, pulled him in opposite directions. He was conscious that his talents and abilities could procure for him a high and permanent place in literature, and would also be invaluable to him in the best society, into which his family and connexions would easily admit him. But to enter society he had better keep out of print. However, fortu-

nately for him and for us, he finally decided to take the risk, and his first literary effort was a novel entitled "Incognita; or Love and Duty Reconciled," which he published under the *nom de plume* of Cleophil, and which was not a great success. He was afterwards wont to declare that he had thrown it off during an idle fortnight, a pose in which he delighted, as it apparently mitigated or excused somewhat the degrading profession of authorship. Had he been Bacon, and written Shakespeare's plays, he would probably have regarded them as a *lapsus calami!*

His first play, "The Old Bachelor," was produced in 1693 at Drury Lane, practically the only theatre in London at that time. Its literary sponsor was the great John Dryden, who had read it in manuscript and pronounced it the best first play he had ever read. With his assistance and with that of Thomas Southern, it was doctored and made ready for the stage, and under his auspices it was produced. During rehearsals Congreve was given the run of the theatre, a thing as unusual in those days as it is customary in these.

"The Old Bachelor" was a great success from the very first, and the author found himself famous and began to reap some of those rewards which, according to the excellent custom of those days, were usually bestowed upon literary merit. Charles Montagu, afterwards Earl of Halifax, then a Lord of the Treasury, found him a post under Government as licenser of hackney carriages, with the promised reversion of a still better billet, when it became vacant, which it did not do for many a long year.

Under the impression that it cast a slur upon his gentility, Congreve jibbed a little at his success at first, and pretended that he had casually dashed off his play,

as he had his novel, in a few odd idle moments. But a careful study of the play itself soon dispels that illusion, for it is very carefully constructed and written and conforms closely to all the constructional conventions of the day. It is what is called, I believe, a comedy of manners, though a comedy of the lack of them would be a better description, and a comedy of intrigue better still. To describe the plot in detail, would be simply to relate a series of vulgar intrigues such as seem to have characterized the traffic of the stage in those days, which, though of course in a very much more objectionable form, somewhat resembled the French stage at the present time. I do not mean to say that there are not great plays and great dramatists in France nowadays. Brieux is perhaps the greatest of all living dramatists, and his plays are all concerned with themes that are either of universal, or at least of national interest, but until very recently the French stage, on the whole, concerned itself a great deal more with pure, or rather impure intrigue, than the stage of other countries.

The main idea of "The Old Bachelor" is one that seems, in one form or another, to be curiously popular with embryo dramatists, fortunately, however, not always in the form that Congreve adopts. His old bachelor is a misogynistic old debauchee, who is very nearly entrapped into marriage against his will with a lady who is little better than himself. Nowadays they would grant the misogyny, whitewash the debauchery, and the dear old man would willingly fall a victim to the artless wiles of a little angel.

It is not by any means certain that the sickly sentimentality of the latter idea is any advance upon the nauseous sensuality of the former, both are sufficiently repulsive. But there is at any rate force and virility

and less humbug in Congreve's way, and the play is written with real verve and vigour. It is indeed in the writing of it, the witty and vivid dialogue and deliciously apt, if not always repeatable, similes that the play excels. Plot and counter-plot, or rather counter-plots, any one of which nearly equals the principal one in importance, are remarkable neither for originality nor for ingenuity. The characters are mainly well-worn stage types. We have shadowy descendants of Falstaff, and ancestors of Bob Acres. Ladies of virtue that is either easy or dubious, doting husbands and deceiving wives, all finding themselves in such situations as they may be expected to get into, and all under the impression that they will get out of them by getting married. The play moves leisurely along in five acts, and many scenes. Congreve's time, the Restoration, was evidently still a period of leisure, ease, indulgence and reaction, and this is shown as much in its plays as in anything else. At the end of the second act of "The Old Bachelor" we have got to a point of advancement which nowadays would be required half-way through the first act. Every act ends with a rhyming tag, one of which is immortal:—

> Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure.
> Married in haste, we may repent at leisure.

Another effort worth quoting is that of Heartwell, the old bachelor, whose chagrin at the fact that he has been "hooked," or thinks he has, finds vent in the following poetry:—

> We hope to find
> That help which Nature meant in womankind,
> To man that supplemental self designed,
> But proves a burning caustic when applied;
> And Adam, sure, could with more ease abide
> The bone when broken, than when made a bride.

There are some charming songs dotted about the play, the one beginning—

As Amoret and Thyrsis lay,

is worthy of Dryden at his best.

"The Old Bachelor" was followed by "The Double Dealer," a play that is an advance upon the former in every way, not excepting the daring of some of the scenes. It was not a great success at first, even the audience of those days being not a little shocked at the revolting character of Maskwell, the villain and *raison d'être* of the piece, and Lady Touchwood, who are something more and something very much worse than mere vulgar intriguers. They do not intrigue merely for the gratification of their senses, but malice, treachery, and villainy are their motives. Maskwell is a specimen of villainy worthy to stand beside Iago in a rogue's gallery.

The play is in five acts and follows very closely the same plan as its predecessor. But it is, as I have said, better written and more powerful. The situations are stronger and the characters that get into them more firmly and strongly drawn and defined.

In an interesting dedicatory epistle, apparently written after the play was produced, to his patron, Montagu, Congreve makes a very able and interesting defence of the soliloquy and general explanation of his methods. He maintains the very reasonable position that a soliloquy is only permissible when it represents a character thinking aloud, whose inmost thoughts it is necessary for the audience to know, and whose only means of conveying them are words. If the character supposes anyone to be by when he is soliloquizing it is monstrous and ridiculous to the last degree, says Congreve, surely very truly. And he goes on to say that if in any part of a play there is expressed any

knowledge of an audience, it is insufferable! He concludes by saying that the dramatist is forced to this expedient of speech because no better way has yet been invented for the communication of thought. Fortunately a better way has now been invented, or rather a fact has been discovered which has successfully abolished the necessity of the soliloquy. Authors, actors and audiences themselves have alike discovered, to their immense gain, that audiences are quite capable of gauging a character's thoughts by its actions, consequently plays not only move very much more quickly nowadays, they stimulate the audiences' thinking powers. Nowadays the audience does the thinking instead of the character. It is a great and wonderful thing to be able to follow Hamlet's soliloquies as the play progresses, but perhaps it would be still greater and more wonderful if so much thinking were not done for us and the sight of Hamlet in action were to stimulate us to realize correctly Hamlet in thought.

One does a good deal of thinking after seeing a play by a great modern, but perhaps one is more conscious of a deal of thinking having been done after seeing a play by a mighty ancient.

Congreve goes on to reply, in this admirable letter, to other criticisms and animadversions that were made upon his play. The criticisms are worth studying. They are of the kind that are levelled at good plays to this day. The average critic appears to be under the impression that to criticize means, primarily, to find fault. But surely a critic's first duty is to find virtues and beauties, and to point them out to those who might otherwise miss them. The critics apparently could find nothing wrong with "The Double Dealer" as a work of art, so they proceeded to censure the morals of its

characters. They said that Mellefont, the hero, was a gull and a fool, and cheated. To which Congreve aptly replied, "Is every man a gull and a fool that is deceived? If so, then all men are fools!"

Well, surely they have got all their weak points. But, the critics seemed to have maintained, Mellefont was such a fool that he did not interest his audience. To which Congreve had the excellent reply that he did, —and as a matter of fact he did! This was a feather in the cap, either of the audience, whose interest in human nature was sufficiently broad to include a fool, or of Congreve, that the fool was sufficiently diverting to be interesting. The critics fell into the not uncommon error of mistaking preaching for criticism, and of telling their public what they ought to like instead of what they *did* like. If I am shown a picture by Landseer of a lion, which I think I like, and am told by a critic merely that I ought not to like it, but I ought to like one by Rembrandt, I am not much the better for the information. But if he shows me that the thing I like is flabby, and boneless and badly proportioned, and has had its mane crimped and its skin groomed in its native wilds, whilst Rembrandt's is the genuine article and explains the genuine article, a much more difficult business, then I am the gainer.

Had they pointed out that Mellefont, as a certain brand of fool did things that that brand never could or would do, their criticism would have been more legitimate. But Congreve took care to draw no such fool and he justifies his hero's character and confounds his critics equally convincingly.

Then he has a word to say to the ladies. They seem to have been very much upset by Lady Touchwood, regarding her as a libel upon their sex, in much the same way as

has been done in our time with Ann Whitfield in "Man and Superman". But neither Ann nor Lady Touchwood is meant to be typical of all women. Ann is perhaps typical of a good many, Lady Touchwood of very few. But to assume that they stand for all is illogical and unjust. As well might all wives rise against Lady Macbeth, or all princesses against Goneril and Regan.

This sort of criticism is put down by some to feminine illogicality, but it is by no means confined to women. Ireland has in our time produced a really great dramatist, J. M. Synge, and to-day many of his countrymen and women are howling because they say he does not present a true picture of Irish life. Irish life is no better and no worse than any other life. It is a mixture, and Synge depicts that part of it that appealed to him as most dramatic and interesting. It may be a pity that he did not depict the lighter and brighter side of Irish life, he did not live very long, otherwise he might have done so, but to attempt to dethrone him from his position as a great artist on that account is a worse and more ungracious crime than hitting a tyrannical old father over the head with a "loy" as was done by Synge's Playboy!

This sort of criticism is the howl produced either by vanity or the cap fitting too closely.

Congreve's letter to Montagu is worthy the careful attention of all critics and dramatists, and "The Double Dealer" was well worth producing, if only for the sake of the letter that accompanied it.

The next play was "Love for Love". It was first played by the great Betterton and his companions in a new theatre they had opened in Lincoln's Inn. It was an immense success, and the actors were so delighted that they gave Congreve a share in their theatre.

"Love for Love" shows a further advance upon the same lines. It is still a pure comedy of intrigue, but some of the characters show signs of a larger outlook. There is more variety in them and they are all very much better contrasted than in the earlier plays. Valentine is a fine character, and his feigned madness is splendidly portrayed, and worthy of Edgar in King Lear. The love scene between the artful Prue and the blunt sailor Ben is as delightful as it is outspoken.

The final tag is spoken by the fair Angelica, who says that

> The miracle to-day is, that we find
> A lover true: not that a woman's kind.

Considering the condition of society at that time a virtue of any kind must have been a miracle.

"Love for Love" was followed in two years' time by another play, an ambitious blank verse tragedy called "The Mourning Bride". The scene was laid in ancient Granada, a place where Congreve was obviously not nearly so much at home as in London. The play, although it achieved great success on its first production, and long remained a favourite on the stage, cannot compare in merit with any of the comedies. As a whole it is bombastic and pretentious, with here and there some very fine poetry and good scenes. It is called a tragedy, but there is really not very much true tragedy in it, although there is plenty that is horrible and revolting, and the blood flows in torrents. But blood is no more *essential* to tragedy than drink is to comedy; nor are either necessarily the outcome of tragedy, though many people seem to think so, and Congreve is perhaps one of them. The murders of Duncan and Cæsar are incidents in the tragedies of Macbeth and Julius Cæsar, but the tragedy of Macbeth is the tragedy of ambition,

and the tragedy of Julius Cæsar the failure of Brutus. But whilst the *material* of "The Mourning Bride" is as poor stuff as Congreve's usually is, the play is not without those elements which raised him so high above his contemporaries. There is some very fine writing in it, the following description of the Temple in Act II was said by Dr. Johnson to be "the most poetical paragraph in the whole mass of English poetry," and to be finer than anything that Shakespeare ever wrote.

'Tis dreadful!
How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads,
To bear aloft its arched and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immovable,
Looking tranquillity! It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold,
And shoot a chillness to my trembling heart.
Give me thy hand, and let me hear thy voice;
Nay, quickly speak to me, and let me hear
Thy voice—my own affrights me with its echoes.

But surely Dr. Johnson exaggerates a little and falls into the dangerous trap one is apt to fall into when dealing with superlatives. If any unfortunate individual had been so rash as to require the doctor to select the most poetical paragraph in the whole mass of English poetry, he might very possibly have met with some such retort as "Sir! None but a fool would put such a question. There are no degrees of comparison in perfection and many paragraphs of English poetry are perfect!"

As for the lines being finer than anything that Shakespeare ever wrote, they may be as fine, but surely he equalled them upon many an occasion, whilst Congreve only once rose to such heights.

Though perhaps the finest, this is by no means the

only piece of fine writing in "The Mourning Bride," and it is besprinkled by many typical saws of Congrevian wisdom, some of which have become proverbial. Amongst these are,

> Music has charms to soothe a savage breast,

and

> Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

Contrary to Congreve's other plays, "The Mourning Bride" must, I think, read better than it acts. This is not because it is wanting in telling situations or opportunities for actors, for they abound, and the mere reading of the play must have made the mouths of the tragic and emotional actors of those days water; but it is, I believe, because Congreve "o'ersteps the modesty of nature". His climax in Act V is horrible. He revels in blood and gloats over the headless trunk of the King. Instead of taking a hint from Shakespeare's "Cymbeline," he seems to have tried to go one better, and does not appear to realize that Shakespeare knew exactly where to stop and generally went as far as he could. That is one of Shakespeare's strongest points. It is one of Congreve's weakest, and it is, perhaps, his mistakes in that direction that prevent his plays from being acted at the present time. A headless trunk is more likely to become a ludicrous than a gruesome or impressive object upon the stage, if we see too much of it. I once saw a Chinese play in which a woman was decapitated. A screen was held before her head whilst the act took place, and then a red cushion was thrown down to represent the severed head whilst the decapitated one stole quietly away. The result was more impressive than it would have been had the head been

a papier-mâché fake. It is interesting that the Chinese, to whom a severed head must be a common object, should have perceived this fact. One wonders if some thing of this sort was done in Macbeth in Shakespeare's time. It would be interesting to know what Macduff carried in place of Macbeth's head.

But "The Mourning Bride" ends happily. I suspect even tragedies had to do that at the Restoration. Those who sat through this welter of blood and beastliness got their reward, and it is to be hoped that they found it an adequate one.

The play continued to be a favourite upon the stage for many years until it was finally, profitably, and rightly banished, and put in a corner of the library.

Congreve's next public appearance was neither as comedian nor tragedian, but as champion. The intrepid Jeremy Collier, a fine specimen of dauntless fanaticism, who made his appearance when such a thing was sadly wanted, wrote his "Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage"; a book that made an immense stir, and doubtless contained much truth among its many injustices. "It was hoped," says Lord Macaulay, "that Dryden would take up the cudgels in defence of the stage," but that great man remained silent, realizing, perhaps, that it was wiser to avoid a controversy which might disclose some dirty linen. But Congreve was foolish to enter the lists. His defence was even weaker than his cause, consisting principally in the familiar cry that in his plays virtue always triumphed, as it undoubtedly did—in the end! But Jeremy Collier would have it triumph in the beginning. Congreve seriously maintained that the healthy and moral little couplets and apothegms with which he and other writers of the day concluded

each act were worth all the rest of the act put together, and compensated for any preceding scenes of debauchery or filth. There is a certain amount of truth in the claim, for many of these little sayings are now familiar to thousands who have never heard of the plays in which they were spoken. But if Congreve really thought and meant what he said in his defence, it would have been more profitable and less arduous for him to have compiled a birthday book. He also trotted out the well-worn little romance that "The Old Bachelor," an especial victim of Collier's wrath, was a mere trifle written to amuse himself in a slow recovery from a fit of sickness. To which Collier made the telling reply, "What his disease was I am not to inquire: but it must be a very ill one to be worse than the remedy!"

It was a pity that Charles Lamb had not arrived on the scenes, for his ingenious championship of the cause contained in the delightful essay on the artificial comedy of the last century, though it would scarcely have silenced Collier's great guns, would have provided a more entertaining spectacle, and probably have had the effect of saddling the right horse, which was really society, not the stage. The stage of any time is the mirror of society. It is, as Shakespeare saw, a mirror, and can never be anything else. Jeremy Colliers only throw stones either at their own or somebody else's reflection, and are likely to do little more than break the mirror; but of course this is an easier and pleasanter way than stoning the original, who might retaliate.

The effect of this digression was to delay Congreve's work as a dramatist, and his next play was not produced until 1700. This was "The Way of the World," generally considered to be his best play. But for some reason or other it did not succeed upon the stage, possibly be-

cause Jeremy Collier's words had had a more far-reaching effect than was expected or suspected. They certainly had an effect upon Congreve's work, for "The Way of the World" is distinctly superior in moral tone to any of its predecessors, although there is still plenty of room for improvement.

But it has heart and sympathy. The heroine, Mrs. Millamant, is a delightful creation. The hero, Mirabell, is actually an estimable old gentleman. The spirited scene in the fourth act, where these two discuss the conditions of their marriage, is delicious, if somewhat intimate and outspoken comedy. If some such open confidence were more often preliminary to marriage, there might be more happy results. Equally spirited is the rollicking scene of the arrival of Sir Wilfull Witwould from the country, thickheaded and downright, his meeting with his foppish brother, his courtship, drunken revel, and final magnanimity and determination to adhere to his original plan of travel and showing the world a thing or two. Lady Wishfort, with her airs and hysterics and vapours, is a splendid acting character.

The villains and villainesses of the piece, the Fainalls and Marwood, Foible and Waitwell, are much like Congreve's other villains and villainesses; brothers and sisters of Maskwell, Heartwell, Mrs. Frail, Saygrace and Setter. All the old material is there, with some that is fresh in the way of heart and sympathy. The plot is more elaborated, complicated and interesting than in the other plays. The writing is even more polished and witty than hitherto, and the whole play must have made a delightful acting comedy. And there really is, I think, no reason why it should not do so still, with a little cleaning up. Congreve dedicated the play to Lord Montagu, to whom he explained his ob-

jects in writing the comedy in another very interesting dedicatory letter, which, amongst other things, showed that Congreve's plays were the result of very careful study and appreciation of the classical dramatists. He explains that his object in writing "The Way of the World" was to supply something a little less obvious and fanciful than what was usually to the taste of the general public at that time. His idea was "to design some characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly (which is incorrigible, and therefore not proper to the stage) as through an affected wit; a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false". In short, as he puts it, he meant to give us a Witwould in place of a Truewit. But the public were too obtuse to grasp this subtlety and seem to have condemned the play because it was not funny enough. Congreve, who was still smarting under Collier's attack, was furious and vowed that he would never write another play for a tasteless public, and he never did.

The remaining twenty-eight years of his life were spent practically without putting pen to paper. He returned to his first love, society, and found that his literary triumphs, far from earning her frown, had won her smile, and he became *persona grata* in exalted circles, to which his birth, excellent though it was, might not otherwise have admitted him. As first he was desperately poor, and it must have needed some resolution to keep his pen idle, but later on the reversion of the place to which he had been nominated many years before by his patron Montagu fell in, and he found himself secretary to the Island of Jamaica with the munificent income of £1200 a year. But habits of frugality had grown upon him, and although he did himself well, he

saved more than half his income. His position was now comfortable and enviable in every way. He was a favourite in society, and a leading light in the literary world, where he was looked up to with admiration and without envy by all the leading and following writers of the day. Pope, who was on the look-out for some one to whom he could dedicate his "Iliad," without giving rise to any heart-burnings, selected Congreve, amid a chorus of universal satisfaction. But Congreve had returned to his ridiculous affectation of pretending to be ashamed of his literary work. Voltaire, on a visit to England, called on the retired dramatist, who intimated that he wished to be regarded, not as a poet, but merely as a gentleman. "If you had been merely a gentleman," said Voltaire, "I should not have come to see you!"

Congreve seems to have been as heartless as his comedies, and was always a bachelor, though he had many flirtations with various stage beauties, the most notorious and enduring being that with Mrs. Bracegirdle. At one time they seem to have been almost upon the verge of matrimony, when an eagle swooped down in the person of Henrietta, daughter, heiress and successor to the great Duke of Marlborough. Congreve was at once caught up in her talons, and remained there until his death and after. There can scarcely have been anything very guilty in their friendship, for Congreve was now getting to be nearly as old as he looked, crippled by gout and blinded by cataract as he was.

But the duchess, whose husband was a foolish nonentity, adulated him; whilst her virulent old mother the famous and infamous Dowager Sarah, tried to rake up a scandal, but the fire would not light.

Congreve died on 19 January, 1728, from the after-effects of a carriage accident on the road to Bath, where

he had been ordered to take the waters. He was buried in Westminster Abbey with great pomp and under the auspices of Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, to whom he bequeathed practically the whole of his fortune of £10,000. There were two small legacies of a couple of hundred each to Mrs. Bracegirdle and one Mrs. Jellat.

The will, not unnaturally, scandalized everybody. People disagreed as to how he should have left his money, whether to Mrs. Bracegirdle, or to restore the fallen fortunes of his family, of which he professed to have been so proud, but they are unanimous upon the point that it should not have been left to one of the wealthiest women in England. The Duchess, to show a becoming respect for her departed friend, purchased with the bequest a magnificent diamond necklace, which she always wore in honour of him. She also had a monument erected to him in Westminster Abbey, and another in her own house. This latter was a wax doll, who sat opposite her at her table and had its poor feet blistered by a doctor daily, for the gout, as Congreve had done! In addition to this she is said to have had a statuette of him carved in ivory, with a clockwork inside, which went very nicely when wound up by her Grace, in short a complete replica, in every way, of Congreve! Other distinguished folk, too, showed their respect for his memory. Lord Cobham erected a ridiculous cenotaph to it at Stowe; so what with his tomb in the Abbey, his wax and ivory effigies, and his cenotaph at Stowe, Congreve was somewhat overmonumented. But these memorials are all, fortunately, perishable. In his plays he has erected for himself a monument that will last as long as the English language. As examples of polished wit, style and epigram,

they have never been surpassed, and seldom equalled. As plays they are perfect specimens of their kind.

Congreve never, for a moment, lost sight of the fact that he was writing for the theatre, and splendid as his comedies are to read, they must be seen acted, to be seen at their very best. It is a thousand pities that their licentiousness prevents their being played at the present day.

In addition to all his other qualifications, Congreve possessed the journalistic talent, essential in a dramatist, in a very high degree, and his plays are almost Hogarthian pictures of the somewhat lively times in which he lived. He was essentially a town-bird, and his plays are all town-bred, excepting for the result of his one not very satisfactory trip to Granada. He was not much hampered by scenic considerations, and we are able to accompany his characters wherever they go, from their bedrooms and boudoirs to the Park or the Piazza, the Mall or the street. Had Congreve been less of a snob, with a wider outlook and broader sympathies, he might possibly have left a smaller legacy to his friend the Duchess, and a larger, more substantial and perhaps permanent one to English dramatic literature. But he seems to have been a man of no character or individuality, in one sense of the word, at all. He was evidently a slave to fashion, in his plays as well as in his life. I mean to say that whilst he seems to have endorsed the drama of his day and stamped it with the hall-mark of some measure of durability, he was always a follower rather than a leader.

His plays crown one epoch, but scarcely herald another. He was probably a lazy genius, who did what came easily to him and avoided difficulties. But with his great facility and talent he could probably, had

he cared to do so, have awakened the drama of his time to something more exhilarating and stimulating than the contemplation of a mere commonplace intrigue, however wittily, stylishly, or elegantly depicted.

Congreve first abused his gifts, then abused his audiences. He was a great artist but not a great man. There is surely no reason why one should not be "an artist and a man"!

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

1751-1816.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was born in Dublin in 1751. His father, Thomas Sheridan, was famous as an actor, a manager, a lexicographer, and the biographer of Swift. As an actor, though never in quite the first flight, he was considered very good indeed. As a manager in Dublin, he was a reformer and improved the conditions behind the scenes in the theatre very considerably during his eight years of management. Moreover he was famous for having brought the great little David Garrick to his senses, and to terms, in something less than five minutes. As a lexicographer he wrote a pronouncing dictionary which was for a very long time regarded almost as a standard work. As a pedagogue, he had ambitions to found a school of oratory, and delivered lectures on elocution in London and at Oxford. His wife, the mother of Richard Brinsley, achieved some fame as a novelist and dramatist. In the latter capacity she wrote three plays, "The Discovery," which was produced at Drury Lane under the management of David Garrick, who played in it himself, playing the part of a tiresome prig and bore in a manner that certainly did not bore his audience. Coleman the Younger said that "he made those eyes which nature had stuck like twin stars in his head look like two coddled gooseberries". Mrs. Sheridan's husband also appeared in the play.

Her other plays were "The Dupe" and "The Trip to Bath," which has been thought by some to have afterwards suggested "The Rivals" to her son. Her plays are, on the whole, very poor, and their existence would have been forgotten long ago, but for her son's better ones.

Sheridan was the third child, and second son of this talented couple. When he was three years old his father and mother were practically driven out of Dublin and their theatre by an infuriated mob, who considered, as Irish audiences sometimes do to this day, that the politics were more important than the play, and wished certain lines in Miller's version of Voltaire's "Mahomet" encored, because they soothed their tender national spirit. Sheridan, who was a genuine artist, absolutely refused, and the mob tore up his benches, invaded his stage, and did deeds of incredible bravery and ferocity amongst his scenery, with their swords. Two years later Thomas Sheridan returned to Dublin and entered management again, but was this time ousted by the success of his rivals, Barry and Woodward. Then he took to lecturing on elocution and worked hard at his pet project, the foundation of an Academy of Oratory. In this he had the cordial support of the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Chesterfield. Some such academy was afterwards founded, but Sheridan was given no hand in it, and it is not surprising that, disgusted with his treatment at the hands of his countrymen, he shook the dust of Dublin from his feet and betook himself to London. Up till this time his two sons had been to a day school in Dublin. Now it was decided to send Richard to Harrow whilst Charles, the elder, remained at home, to be the object of his parents' experiments in upbringing and education.

And so Richard began life with all the advantages of a younger son! However, he did not do much with them at first. At Harrow he was popular with masters and boys alike on account of his sunny and lively disposition, but left behind him no particular reputation for intelligence. When fifteen years old he lost his mother, who died at Blois, whither she and her husband had fled from creditors. The father returned to London, and at the age of eighteen Richard Brinsley left Harrow and joined his brother to be "finished" by his father. The finishing process consisted of lessons in fencing and riding, oratory and English grammar, taught them by their father, and Latin and mathematics, taught them by an old Irish tutor.

Sheridan had made friends at Harrow with a boy named Halhed. They had formed a literary partnership which was not dissolved when their ways diverged, for though Halhed went to Oxford, Sheridan and he collaborated upon a three-act farce, with the significant and sonorous title of "Jupiter". They reckoned to get this produced by Foote and to clear a sum of at least £200 by it, but neither eventuality occurred! They then produced and published a little book containing an English verse adaptation of the prose works of a little-known Greek author called Aristænetus. The Sheridan-Halhed version caused his work to be known no better, and gave no one any desire for a further acquaintance with him.

The Sheridans were now living at Bath, whither the father had moved in 1770, his circumstances made a little more easy by a pension of £200 a year, obtained for him by Lord Bute. He also earned a little by paying another visit to Dublin and teaching certain members of the Irish Parliament elocution, a task which

must have been about as difficult as teaching ducks to swim.

In Bath lived one Thomas Linley, an English musician of no mean order. His daughter Elizabeth was the greatest of all the great beauties of Bath. And she seems to have been as good as she was beautiful. But she was a professional singer, and her public position caused her to be much pestered by undesirable and desirable lovers. Amongst the desirables were both the Sheridans, Charles and Richard, and Richard's friend Halhed. Amongst the undesirables was an elderly gentleman to whom Eliza, as she was called, was engaged at the age of sixteen, but she broke off the engagement, and her father tactfully arranged matters so that the old gentleman settled £3000 upon her as a compensation for breach of promise! Another undesirable was one Captain Matthews, a wealthy Welsh landowner, whose intentions seem to have been neither honourable nor remote. To escape them and also those of many others, whose names were legion, Miss Linley, acting under the advice of Richard Brinsley, decided to flee to France and there take refuge in a convent. Richard Brinsley chivalrously offered to escort her. This he did, and to complete the picture of ancient chivalry, claimed the rescued damsel as his reward, and got her. They were married first and afterwards Miss Linley, or Mrs. Sheridan, took refuge in a convent at Lisle, and Sheridan returned to Bath and faced the music of Linley père's wrath which was not so sweet as his other music. Not only did the irate parent sternly refuse to recognize the match, but Bath was in a ferment, and Captain Matthews challenged Sheridan to a duel. The first duel was fought in Hyde Park and seems to have been an absurd fiasco. They found it so

difficult to escape observation that they finally adjourned to a coffee-house, where Sheridan seems to have disregarded all the rules of duelling and to have rushed in under his opponent's guard almost before the seconds had given the word, smashed his sword and then demanded an apology at the point of his own. This led to a second duel which was fought at Bath, which seems to have developed into a sort of rough and tumble, both combatants rolling upon the ground and pummelling each other. Sheridan seems to have had his share of wounds, but whether they were caused by his own or his opponent's blade, hilt or fists ; or whether the blood that freely flowed was the genuine article, or merely some claret which Sheridan had been drinking to excess previous to the duel, will never be known. Various versions, each entirely different from the others, were published by various persons who had been present on both occasions, and if anyone is sufficiently interested in the ridiculous and unimportant event to try and get at the true facts of it, they have plenty of work before them. The final result was that apologies were tendered and honour somewhat easily satisfied. Sheridan was also satisfied, for Mr. Linley now consented to the match. Miss Linley had returned from France and had been singing in public and having clandestine meetings in private with Sheridan, who is said sometimes to have disguised himself as her coachman and driven her to the opera. The two were re-married, with the parental blessing, on 13 April, 1773, and retired to love and live in a cottage at East Burnham, on the interest of £3000, paid to Miss Linley as compensation for her first escape from matrimony ! This marriage, which reads like a romance, or rather a comedy by Sheridan, which indeed it was, culminated in a really happy, though all too short married life.

The young couple lived barely a year at East Burnham, and then moved to a house in Orchard Street, Portman Square, and here Sheridan wrote "The Rivals". It was written for Covent Garden where it was produced for the first time on 17 January, 1775. The story of its first night failure is a familiar piece of theatrical history, and the actor Lee, to whose ill success in the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger the failure was mainly due, has achieved immortality on that account! The fact that the failure of one part, and that by no means the most important one, wrought so much mischief, says a very great deal for the artistic value of the play as a whole. Especially at the present time when the reverse sometimes happens and the too striking performance of one part has sometimes been known to upset the equilibrium of a whole play. But in Sheridan's plays, at any rate, the part never equals or exceeds the whole! As a comedy, "The Rivals" has plenty of faults. It is, I think, too long and too loquacious, and there are too many subsidiary interests, and the main intrigue is, in itself, really almost too slight to carry a five-act comedy. In any other hands but those of a genius such a mistake was bound to spell disaster. It is the kind of play, more or less, that is fashionable at the present day, 1913, depending more for success upon style, humour, characterization than upon actual drama, as drama is generally understood. And the style, atmosphere, humour and characterization of "The Rivals" are perfect. Although producing an effect of spontaneity, as all works of genius do, a close examination reveals the presence of immense care and pains in the working out of the play. Nothing is omitted, nothing is left to chance, and, as was the custom of those days, little is left to the imagination. The notion that

"The Rivals" is a happy-go-lucky farce, seems to me entirely misleading. Like its great successor, "The School for Scandal," it is practically a play of one situation, and of that situation Sheridan never once loses sight. Everything plays up to the absurd duel scene, a scene which was probably suggested to him by his own ridiculous adventures in that direction.

All the characters, grave, gay, and ridiculous, converge to this great scene, and a careful study of the dialogue and events of the preceding acts, shows how Sheridan kept it before him constantly. At the same time he knows his road so well that having no fear of losing it, or wandering off down by-ways and lanes, he can stop to pick the flowers by the way, and regale us with chit-chat and familiar studies of tales of men and things, like a Canterbury Pilgrim. An artist who knows the road is a delightful companion. This singleness of purpose has another admirable effect in that it keeps the author's sense of proportion just, and the wood is not obscured by the trees, the characters and incidents all fall naturally into their right places and the result is a design, a complete work of art. This result is certainly achieved in "The Rivals," and, in my opinion, is the chief glory of the play. The characterization and humour are both, I think, a little obvious, if not strained. Bob Acres and Mrs. Malaprop, delightful though they both are, seem yet to bear traces of the prentice hand, as indeed does the play as a whole in spite of its success as a work of art. One may be an artist before one can draw, but till one can draw and gain a free hand one can never give others the full benefit of one's art. Sir Anthony Absolute and Sir Lucius O'Trigger are both types which seem to have been fairly common in plays and novels of the period, and in Bath. But Sheridan

has immortalized them. But Falkland and Julia are the characters that really give one pause. Here, surely, Sheridan touched a really live wire. Falkland's doubts and fears and moroseness are very annoying, and one wonders why Julia has not sent him to the right about long ago. But deep down in her heart she loves him, and that love probably tells her that his doubts are not altogether unworthy, or unreasonable, that he is desperately anxious to have nothing but the genuine article and that the fact of her being under an obligation to him is the thorn in his side. After all he is only anxious to assure himself that he is loved for himself alone, or perhaps it would be better to say in spite of himself. And that is what we all want, and what Julia, with her large forgiving, maternal heart, gives him. I think that in these two characters Sheridan gives a hint of some of the deep things latent within him, and shows us what he might have been had he never deserted the stage for the platform.

I have said that in some of the humour and characterization there are marks of the prentice hand. And so there are in the play as a whole, just as there are in Shakespeare's "Richard III," but it is the prentice hand of a genius. In "The Rivals" it seems to me to take the usual form of great anxiety to tell the audience everything, of fear that they will miss something important.

This ultra-anxiety is a characteristic of the young, untried author, and it is refreshing to see a great man sharing it. Like Lady Teazle's consciousness of her own innocence, Sheridan's consciousness of his own inexperience made him guilty of a thousand little explanations, justifications, hints and amplifications that are quite unnecessary and had quite disappeared by the time

he came to write "The School for Scandal". Intuition and genius may tell one many things, but experience tells one more. And Sheridan was quick to profit by it. The next play that he wrote was a farce entitled "St. Patrick's Day or the Scheming Lieutenant". It was written entirely for Clinch, the actor who had saved the situation and the play of "The Rivals" by his performance of Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Otherwise there is nothing remarkable about the play, which would have been dead and buried long ago, but for its author.

His next serious effort was "The Duenna," an operatic play, nowadays it would be a musical comedy, written for Covent Garden, and the music composed by Thomas Linley, Sheridan's father-in-law. Sheridan's own father had quarrelled with him about something, or more probably nothing, and hence did not assist in any way at the rehearsals, many of which took place at Sheridan's home in Orchard Street.

And what rehearsals those must have been, brightened with his own wit, and sweetened with his wife's voice and exquisite beauty. The play was first produced on 21 November, 1775, and was an instantaneous and, for those days, lasting success, being performed seventy-five times during that season.

It is a charming comedy, interspersed with beautiful little lyrics, duets and quartettes. The music is said to have been exquisitely lovely, and I believe that if the play were well produced and mounted to-day, with the right atmosphere of Old Spain, it would command a very large measure of success and interest.

The story is simple in the extreme and easily told. Don Jerome has a daughter. They always do in Spain! That daughter has a lover. They always do in Spain! But the lover is disapproved of by her father. They

always are in Spain! And his father has his own idea for his daughter's marriage. They always have in Spain. This idea is wealthy. It always is in Spain. It is also unattractive! The daughter has a Duenna, as daughters do in Spain. And the Duenna has her eye upon Mendoza's money-chest. Fortunately for the play and those concerned, there is a custom in Spain of wearing a mantilla or veil, and concealed under these the Duenna and the daughter are enabled to exchange identities. For the Duenna wants to marry the Jew for his money-bags, as much as the daughter wants the hero for his heart.

There is a secondary hero and a secondary heroine, a convent and some rascally priests. Thus we have all the material for a charming comedy of intrigue and romance, whose end is foretold from the beginning. Things fall out as we hope they will fall out, and then fall in as we hope they will fall in. As I have already said, here is a charming comic opera ready to hand for anyone who is on the look-out for such a thing. It would not be an expensive production of its kind. The cast is a small one, the mounting would gain nothing by lavishness, but everything by taste. The present generation has not, unless I am very much mistaken, had the opportunity to see and hear this charming opera. I am sure they would not be in a hurry to miss it.

The success of "The Duenna" raised Sheridan to the pinnacle of fame, and made him, not yet twenty-four, the fashionable dramatist of the hour. With a keen eye to business, David Garrick produced "The Discovery," Sheridan's mother's play, at Drury Lane, but the reflected glory was not sufficient to turn it into a success. It was almost the great little actor's last speculation, for he was now sixty years old and had

practically made up his mind to retire. Sheridan, riding upon the crest of the wave, saw what he thought was his opportunity, seized it and, as things turned out, was eventually swamped by it. He determined to step into Garrick's shoes as part manager of Drury Lane, and in June, 1776, had found, heaven, or hell, only knows how, £10,000 to pay for two-fourteenths of Garrick's holding. His father-in-law Linley became responsible for a like number of shares, and other members of the public were found willing and even eager to invest their money in a venture with the witty and brilliant Mr. Sheridan at the head.

The world went very well for Sheridan then. At home his wife had presented him with a beautiful boy, Tom, upon whom the father doted and dilated. The relations between the two afterwards became very much like those between Sheridan and his own father. Young Tom was a thorough chip of the old block, and the encounters between him and his father were delicious. Young Tom once complained that he had no money, whereupon his father suggested that he should try the King's highway! To this young Tom retorted that he had done so, but had had no luck, as he had stopped a company of Drury Lane players, who had no money, not yet having been paid their salaries. Another version of the story has it that young Tom said that he had tried the highway, but had had no luck, having stopped Peake, Sheridan's treasurer at the theatre, who was, of course, quite empty-handed, Sheridan having been to the till before him! But the son did not always have things his own way. Speaking of party humbugs, young Tom remarked that if he went into the House he should join no party, but write upon his forehead the words "To be let". "And under that," said his father, "unfurnished."

The next production from Sheridan's pen was a play called "A Trip to Scarborough," which was a version of Vanbrugh's play, "The Relapse," and it proved one, but Sheridan quickly made amends, for about three months later, on the 8th of May, 1777, was produced his greatest play, "The School for Scandal". It was an immediate and unqualified success, and has remained so ever since. Sheridan had been working very hard and carefully upon it for a long time, as his manuscripts showed. It was originally two separate plays, which he had boiled down into one and then strained very carefully through the sieve of his experience. It is interesting to compare the original drafts with the play as completed, and to notice the improvements. Sir Peter Teazle was originally a widower, and plain Mr. Solomon Teazle, whose first marriage had been a disastrous failure, lasting, fortunately for him, barely two years. He came on and told the audience this in a soliloquy at the very opening of the play, thus losing their sympathy and robbing the main situation of half its charm and interest. So Solomon was turned into Peter and Peter was knighted, or baroneted whichever it was, and the little country miss became Lady Teazle; the situation gained in contrast and distinction, and the audience have the additional and pleasurable sensation of watching an old bachelor losing his crust.

Moreover, Sheridan had learnt that it is not wise to divulge the main situation too early in the proceedings. There are artistic reasons for this, as well as the purely practical one that at the opening of a play there is probably still a good deal of movement going on among the audience. And it is a serious mistake to spring the main situation upon an audience, before they have had the time or opportunity to appreciate it at its full value.

The fact that Lady Teazle has been transplanted from the country to new surroundings is more impressive when we know what these new surroundings are like. So Sheridan first of all shows us the company she has come into, before Sir Peter comes on and describes to us that which she came out of. The position of his soliloquy is altered very much for the better in the new version, would that it had been altered still further and been entirely done away with! The quarrel that follows brings the important facts out quite as clearly and much more piquantly. Sir Peter's soliloquy, in accordance with an old stage custom, now mercifully exploded, only prepares us for what is coming, waters the glass before we get the grog. The element of surprise was entirely lacking in the old drama, but surely it is one of the most important elements, and the unexpected or unrealized is essential to live drama. I know that, as a matter of fact, in old Greek tragedy and in Shakespeare, the audience are practically never surprised. They are merely lookers-on, contemplators of the drama. Nowadays they expect to share in it to some extent, and if the object of a play is to create an illusion, surely that is as it should be. In any case it must enlarge their sympathies, and appreciation, and interest.

The family name of the Surfaces had been at different stages of the manuscript Plausible, Pliable, and Pliant. Excellent names, all of them, but not so good as Surface. They are too obvious. Surface seems to express the characters of both, for both are distinctly superficial. That is to say, that the characters they present to the world are not at all their real ones. Each is striving to be popular and effective. Joseph believes in sentiment and morals, Charles in sentimentalism and immorals. Joseph is sleek and Charles is slack. Joseph parades

the popular virtues, Charles the popular vices, and they are easier to live up to. It would be difficult to say which brother did the more mischief or caused the more suffering.

I find it easier to believe in the insincerity of Joseph than the sincerity of Charles. Charles had a fine eye for effect. His refusal to sell his uncle's portrait seems rather plausible. His uncle, if he had any character at all, would probably have liked him all the better if he had been knocked down with the rest. Joseph is far more consistent in his villainy, but perhaps such consistency is hardly a virtue! I cannot help thinking that Charles, with his habits and his keen eye for dramatic and telling effect, must have been an unconscious portrait of Sheridan himself, and Joseph Surface a portrait of his "familiar". Charles Surface what he succeeded in being, Joseph Surface what he succeeded in avoiding. When all is thought, said and done, there is not really very much to be said for these two beauties, or very much difference between them, except that they are both masterpieces of characterization. And so is Lady Teazle. She is as true as the two brothers are false. Sir Peter has obviously been a self-centred, self-indulgent old bachelor, or he would never have been taken in by her print dress, modest mien and demurity, prettiness and simplicity. It may be unchivalrous to say so, but I simply do not believe that these things exist in young ladies, old ladies, or ladies of any age, time, or place. Girls never have been and never will be kittens. The so-called homely virtues of submission and docility never did and never will exist in any girl's heart, though they may be donned with her gowns. The demure, downcast eye, behind the poke-bonnet of the early Victorian era as often as not hid very quick

intelligence or silent suffering. Like many an old, and young self-satisfied silly fool before and since his day, Sir Peter thought he had got what he wanted and found he had got what he *needed ;* something that would shake him out of himself and give him no rest until he was thoroughly cured.

Lady Teazle is a splendid warm-hearted creature who never humbugs herself and would have been torn into a thousand pieces ere she yielded to Joseph's insinuations. She plays with fire, it is true, but it is because of her upbringing, not her inclinations. Folk who have been brought up in an ice-house may be forgiven for going too near the flame at first.

Sir Peter Teazle has no character at all to speak of at the opening of the play. He is a crusty old bachelor, but he will have plenty of character, and very nice character, by the end of the chapter.

The other characters in the play are all types. Maria is the best of them, morally I mean. She sticks to her chosen hero in the face of much opposition and some facts.

The construction of the play is, according to the canons then in vogue, perfect. It is obviously worked out with immense care, and, as in "The Rivals," Sheridan never loses sight of his main situation. Everything is subordinated to it, leads to it, depends upon it and falls away from it at the end.

The plays open, in Shakespearean style, with the entrance of the villains and hatching of the plot. Joseph Surface comes in behind his screen, and Sheridan then and there begins to knock it down and goes on doing so metaphorically, until Charles Surface does so actually. And the pious screen of learning and sentiment that hides Joseph is not the only screen that is knocked

down, but the scandalous one that conceals the real Lady Teazle from her friends, and that of his own making, which hides her from her husband, also falls. In fact the whole play is a knocking down of screens.

From the villains we come by natural steps to the victims, but not before we have a little hint through Rowley of the eventual victors. In the short second act this is carried still further, and the God in the Car comes on the scenes in the person of Sir Oliver, acquaints himself fully with the situation, and expresses his opinion thereon. In the third act he is satisfied that his opinion is the right one (the God in the Car generally is), and in the fourth act everybody else is. People and things come out in their real colours.

The fifth act shows us that this has had the desired and expected effect, and there is a general tying up all round. The end is conventional, it is, in a sense, a conventional comedy, and bears no sign of raggedness, although it was written under great pressure. "*Finished at last. Thank God!*" wrote Sheridan at the foot of the manuscript. "*Amen!*" wrote the prompter, W. Hopkins; small blame to him!

The fact that Joseph Surface never reforms is refreshing, and mitigates the accusation of artificiality which has, not altogether unjustly, been levelled against the play. But it is a comedy of manners. An artificial comedy of artificial times. The situations, telling and effective though they are, are not very real. But many telling situations happened in those days, and happen now, which are not real. Sheridan was always contriving them. He contrived one when he escorted the beautiful and talented Miss Linley to a conventual retreat in France, far removed from the world, the flesh, and the devil. But it was not real, or else he would

have left her there! The situations of "The School for Scandal" were quite a possibility, if they did not actually happen, in Sheridan's day. And belike the quaint, stilted, periodical manner of talking was real. The dialogue of "The School for Scandal" is light, witty, and airy, but it is also literary, and few characters open their mouths without giving expression to a carefully rounded or phrased sentence or period.

In the same way Shakespearean characters talk blank verse, and yet they talk very naturally, because the thoughts they utter are natural. And so it seems to me with Sheridan, and that "The School for Scandal" is an extraordinarily true, faithful, and plausible picture of the times. It is, in every sense of the word, a real comedy and work of art, depending upon something more than mere journalism, although journalism should, and must, play a very important part in every play; but "The School for Scandal" is more than that, or it would have died a natural death years ago. It is immortal with the immortality of Art.

Two years after its production Sheridan produced his last original play, "The Critic; or a Tragedy Rehearsed". In the meantime Garrick had died, and Sheridan had followed him to the grave as chief mourner, written a monody to his memory, and practically acquired the whole of his share in Drury Lane Theatre. Although, in a sense, topical and typical of its time, "The Critic" has maintained its popularity up to the present day, though of quite recent years it has only been spasmodically produced and still more spasmodically played at special performances. But in Charles Mathews's day it was popular and one of his favourite drawing cards.

Some of the point of "The Critic" has, of course,

been lost by the disappearance from the scenes of the originals of some of the characters. Sir Fretful Plagiary thinly veiled the petty personality of Cumberland, the dramatist. Dangle is supposed to have been one Vaughan, one of those busy-bodies who professed to be behind all the scenes. Puff gave rise to much discussion at the time, and by some is thought to have found his prototype in Woodfall, the publisher, but this is so manifestly unjust to that high-minded and high-principled person, that it is quite impossible to think of Sheridan as being guilty of such an inartistic mistake. The probability is that Puff did not stand for a person at all, but for a profession. There are very many Puffs to-day. They are officially known as Press Agents. But Sir Fretful Plagiary's peculiarities are not so much professional as personal. Like W. S. Gilbert's "Patience," however, the extreme popularity of "The Critic" depended upon more permanent grounds than mere personalities. Its wit and humour and admirable parody of Shakespeare are mingled with not a little common sense and sound advice to dramatic authors. If some of them would study carefully the dialogue between Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton at the opening of "The Spanish Armada," there would be an immediate improvement in the methods they employ to give information to their audience. Moreover, Sheridan has something to say anent the little way that some authors have of ignoring the human element and practical considerations, and also has a dig at the actors who arrange among themselves how, why, and where the play shall be "cut".

In short, as a study of "how not to do it," "The Critic" or rather "The Spanish Armada" forms a

splendid object-lesson. It might be maintained that "The School for Scandal" is an equally good model of how to do it. But that is not at all the case. Fashions in plays change, and the device that deceives to-day is seen through to-morrow. I have read a modern play carefully written, constructed and studied upon the lines of Sheridan, and the effect was ludicrous.

There is very little variation in our mistakes, but infinite variety in our achievements.

I once heard a would-be dramatist remark that there was only one vice, but uncountable virtues, a remark that was worth all the plays she had ever written up to date, and probably ever will write.

After "The Critic" Sheridan laid down his pen, and excepting for a translation of Kotzebue's bombastic and idiotic play "Pizarro," wrote no more for the theatre. He took the opportunity of a dissolution of Parliament to contest and win the constituency of Stafford. The brilliant playwright now became a brilliant politician. That is to say, as an orator. As a minister, he began well, but ended disastrously, being altogether too casual, indolent, and happy-go-lucky for the drudgery and responsibility of office. His career as a politician is only interesting to us as it throws light upon his dramatic and artistic ability. And it throws considerable light upon them. His speeches and their dramatic effect were as carefully studied as were his plays. His wonderful speech at the impeachment of Warren Hastings was the greatest thing he had done since "The School for Scandal," and the conclusion of it, when he sank fainting into the arms of Burke, was most effective. But his career as a statesman does not leave an impression of deep sincerity. He was a witty as well as a brilliant orator, but many of his best

"impromptus" and repartees seem carefully to have been led up to and engineered beforehand. In short, he was a born dramatist, and it is a thousand pities he did not content himself with remaining one. Even management was a mistaken step, and he who could not do his share properly in the management of a theatre was scarcely likely to do it in that of a kingdom! But had he confined himself to writing plays, one wonders where an author who had begun with "The Rivals" and "The School for Scandal" would have ended. He was a "morning glory" if ever there was one. He started life in a halo of romance, prosperity and promise, and ended it in debt, squalor and disgrace. His first wife, the beautiful Miss Linley, predeceased him in 1792, his second, Miss Esther Ogle, the daughter of the Dean of Winchester, survived him.

His character could never keep pace with his talents. He died on 7 July, 1816, and was buried, with great pomp, beside David Garrick in Westminster Abbey. A grave in that hallowed spot needs no epitaph, but they might have carved upon the tomb of Sheridan—

Here lies one of life's greatest successes, and greatest failures!

As a dramatist his fame seems to depend almost as much upon what he might have done as upon what he did. His finished works, incomparable though they are, are only forerunners. They bear traces of infinite individuality. One feels that the mine from which they were drawn was inexhaustible. In spite of the immense care with which they were obviously written, there is yet all the ease and facility of a great genius. It has been said that Sheridan owed much to the dramatists who preceded him, especially those of the Restoration period. But a comparison with the best of

them, Congreve, is immensely in Sheridan's favour. Congreve, as we have seen, was a most careful workman, a man who bound himself strictly with the conventions of his trade, who had imagination, wit and liveliness, but no heart. He represented a heartless period. Sheridan came at a time when the human heart was beginning to be recognized as essential to the human art, if art was to live, and his plays have got that touch of sympathy, and a hankering after better things, which makes them live. Lady Teazle, Julia, Falkland, Maria and Sir Peter, are live characters which are seldom if ever found in the drawing-rooms, gardens, or bed-chambers of Congreve, Wycherley or Vanbrugh.

Sheridan certainly owes something to the Restoration dramatists, but they owe more to him. Their nomenclature, their methods, and their style he has, to a certain extent, adopted and copied, but he has improved upon it, he has toned down their extravagances, curtailed their fopperies, fripperies and indecencies, and refined their spurious and base metal into gold and silver that is pure enough and has enough of the genuine ring to pass currency for ever.

THOMAS WILLIAM ROBERTSON.

1829-1871.

Thomas William Robertson was born at Newark-upon-Trent, Nottinghamshire, on 9 January, 1829. He came of theatrical stock, and was the eldest son of a very large family, the youngest member of which is now famous as Mrs. Kendal. His father was of Scottish descent and his mother, formerly a Miss Marinus, was of Dutch origin, which may possibly explain one of young Tom's many talents, an extraordinary aptitude for languages.

Young Tom became very early in life the special protégé of his great-aunt Maria, Mrs. Tom Robertson, an excellent actress, and it seems an exceptionally gifted and cultured widow lady, who for some years after her husband's death practically took over the entire management of the Lincoln circuit. The old lady kept a diary, which is good reading. Her accounts of her failures and triumphs, and adventures when posting from town to town in her little pony-chaise are wonderfully stimulating and interesting. In 1836 Master Tom was sent to his first school, a place known as the Spalding Academy, of which one Mr. Young was the head master. Here Tom seems to have been the school wag, and the school "star" on speech days. In 1841 he left the Spalding Academy and went to a school at Whittlesea, kept by one Mr. Moore, but this did not last long, as he

was wanted badly at home to help with the bread-winning.

Things were not going particularly well on the Lincoln circuit, and before he was fifteen years old he was very busy indeed, acting as a sort of "general utility" with the company, and getting experience that must have been invaluable to him in after years. This sort of thing continued for seven years, until Tom became heartily sick of it and determined to tempt fortune in other fields. In the little spare time that he had from the theatre he had always worked hard, especially at improving himself and studying languages, and in 1848 he applied for, and succeeded in getting, the appointment of usher at a school in Utrecht, where an English-speaking usher was required. He did not mention where he was going, or what he was going to do when he got there, to a soul, but one day just quietly disappeared, to the inexpressible grief and anxiety of his gentle mother, and of his large family, who might almost have been excused had they felt relieved at his departure. Tom was searched for high and low but was nowhere to be found, and his family were in despair. One day, six weeks after, the prodigal returned; sadder, wiser, hungrier and far more wretched than when he set out. He was first seen by his sister Fanny, standing in the wings during a performance at Newark. They all went home together after the performance, as fat a calf as the family could run to was killed, and the prodigal related his adventures in the far country to which he had been. The school in Utrecht, it appears, was a sort of Dutch Dotheboys, where Tom had a fierce red-haired rival and enemy in the person of the native usher, a being as cordially detested by the boys as Tom was liked. This usher afterwards became the prototype

of Krux in "School". The food at the school was revolting and Robertson used always to declare, in after life, that it had laid the seeds of his very delicate constitution. It had not been, by any means, easy for him to get to Utrecht, and it was still more difficult for him to get away. However, with the friendly aid of the British Consul he managed to get back to England, and once again in the ample bosom of his family he set to work very seriously to help them. He used to declare in after life, that he was never a very good actor, but if so, it was not for want of experience, for in the days that followed his return home from his disastrous Dutch experience he seems to have played every part in "stock," from Hamlet to the call boy.

But the days of the old touring circuits were fast drawing to a close. Railways had made everything so accessible that these country towns were no longer satisfied with country companies and expected better things from London. They probably got something very much worse, but the fact that they came from London was the magnet, just as it is to-day when "So-and-so's" London company is billed as the attraction, the company generally having seen about as much of London as London has seen of them. Not that they are any the worse actors for that. But, owing chiefly to this invasion from the metropolis, the Lincoln circuit was abandoned, the company disbanded, and, worse wrench of all, the Robertson family broken up. Tom carried the war into the enemy's camp by setting out for London himself.

In London he wrote his first drama, and what is more wonderful got it accepted. He was now about twenty years of age. The play was called "A Night's Adventure" and was produced by William Farren, the

elder, at the Olympic Theatre on 25 August, 1851, and Robertson's hopes ran high, only to be dashed to the ground when, four nights later, the run of the play came to an untimely end. The result was a quarrel between Farren and Robertson, Farren blaming the play, Robertson the acting. There were doubtless faults on both sides, but probably Robertson was the most to blame, as the company were all experienced actors, while he was an extremely inexperienced author. Or it may be that he had already begun as a reformer, and the play, which has never been published, was an attempt to put new wine into old bottles. In any case, his quarrel with Farren was an extremely foolish business, and he would have been wiser to have gleaned what comfort and encouragement he could from the fact that he had succeeded in getting his first play produced.

He earned his living at this time principally as an actor, playing sometimes in London, and sometimes in provincial stock companies. During this period he first met and laid the foundation of a life-long friendship with H. J. Byron. These two strutted and starved together for many a long day. Once when they were "resting," in other words, doing very much the hardest part of the poor actor's work—trying to get it—they made a tentative venture into management. There was a room to let in the Gallery of Illustration. Robertson and Byron managed to raise sufficient capital to hire it for a week, and there arranged to give some performances of a series of monologues, played by each of them in turn. Duologues were impossible, as whilst one was on the stage the other had to be in the box-office. On the first night the curtain rose to an impatient audience of one, seated in the front row of the stalls. Byron opened the pro-

ceedings with the recitation of a monologue entitled "The Origin of Man".

"In the beginning there was only one man," said he, doing his best to grip the attention of his audience.

"Yes!" said the audience, "and I'm the damned fool!" And with that he rose, made his way to the box-office, where he asked for his money back, saying he had come to see "the Chinese". Some Chinese jugglers were performing in another part of the building. Robertson did his best to persuade him that Byron was a Chinee, but without effect, the man insisted upon the return of his money. However, fourpence of it had already been spent on drinks for the performers, so the takings were not absolutely nil, nor were the expenses, but the remaining capital was. The run of the performance ended on that night.

The two friends continued to stick close together for some years, eking out a precarious living by writing scraps for various weekly newspapers, accepting small weekly engagements for still smaller salaries, sometimes so minute as to be quite invisible, and writing small farces and one-act plays which they sold in batches to Lacy, the publisher. Once, when very down upon their luck, the two went to enlist in the Horse Guards. Byron was accepted and Robertson rejected, but Byron refused to join without his friend. Robertson was refused, it is said, on account of constitutional heart trouble, a trouble which, if it gave him to the stage with the one hand, soon snatched him away again with the other.

In 1855 he was playing juvenile lead under his father's joint management with J. W. Wallack at the Marylebone Theatre. The season is interesting in that during it some of Mrs. Kendal's first appearances on the stage were made, in children's parts. It was followed

by a trip to Paris to play "Macbeth" at the Theatre des Italians, the whole company going over. This was even more disastrous than Robertson's early venture to Holland. The company were only paid one week's salary for four weeks' work, and with difficulty found their way back to England; the ladies being sent over in a body first, and the men straggling after, as best they could.

During this year Robertson first met his wife, a Miss Elizabeth Taylor, known upon the stage as Burton. He first met her, curiously enough, at the old Queen's Theatre, the "Dust Hole," off Tottenham-Court Road, which he afterwards helped to make so famous as "The Prince of Wales'". One good turn deserves another.

As Miss Burton and he had nothing much to live upon, they had nothing much to worry about, and the engagement was as short as engagements of any sort generally were with him. They were married at Christ Church, Marylebone, on 27 August, 1856. Then followed a joint engagement at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and afterwards in the provinces of Ireland, where his wife played leading lady, and he leading comedian, also lending a hand at the stage-management. This engagement lasted a year, after which they returned to England, played a short season at the Surrey Theatre, followed by another joint engagement at the Marylebone Theatre, where Mrs. Robertson was very successful as leading lady, until her performances were brought to an end by a little production on her own account. A son "Tommy" was born on 2 December, 1857. The following year a daughter "Betty" was born to them, but died very soon afterwards, whilst they were touring at Windsor, where they had a "Royal Night," playing before the Prince Consort and the Royal Family.

Robertson's marriage was a very successful speculation

in every way. Domestically he was ideally happy, whilst his wife appears to have been an excellent actress who had little difficulty in finding good engagements for herself and her husband as well. But the husband now determined to leave the stage and devote all his time to writing. This he did, and from now onwards worked tremendously hard at adapting, translating and writing little plays for Lacy, and at all sorts of contributions to magazines, most of which he succeeded in "placing". His wife continued to act, and together they succeeded in not only making ends meet fairly comfortably, but enjoyed a few luxuries. Tom was a member of two clubs, the Savage and the Arundel, where he was one of the most brilliant as well as the most popular of a literary coterie which contained such wits as Tom Hood (the younger), H. J. Byron, W. S. Gilbert, E. L. Blanchard, and many others. His one-act farce of "The Cantab" was produced at the Strand Theatre in 1861, and its success gave quite a fillip to his reputation, now growing, not exactly by leaps and bounds, but by a series of steady little hops, most of them on one foot, and that not his best foot either, for although an admirable journalist, it was as a dramatist that in his heart of hearts he wished to, and felt he could and would, succeed. He made a very definite move forward in that direction in 1863, when he wrote his novel of "David Garrick," very wisely reserving to himself all dramatic rights. The story is said to have been originally that of a French play written round Kean, and to be founded on a purely imaginary incident. But it could scarcely have happened to Kean, who was not much given to self-sacrifice, and who would probably have carried Ada Ingot off from under her father's nose. There may also be some sort of foundation in fact for the legend, for the

course of David Garrick's very true love did not, by any means, run smoothly, and he had recourse to many a splendid bit of unrehearsed acting ere he obtained lawful possession of "La Violetta".

Robertson having strictly reserved to himself the dramatic rights of this novel, adapted a play from it, which went the round of all the London managers, not a very big one in those days, and was steadily refused. The author, taking the advice of his friends, stuck to the property, but parted with the publishing rights to Lacy for £10. So things continued, Robertson steadily writing, writing, writing: plays, novels, and songs, with a varying measure of success. But brighter days were in store. Sothern got wind of "David Garrick," expressed a desire to hear it, and lent Robertson the £10 necessary to redeem it from Lacy. The manuscript was produced and read to Sothern at a supper party at his house, at which were present, amongst others, Buckstone of the Haymarket and John Hollingshead. From the first the listeners were very favourably impressed, and the drunken scene clinched the matter. Robertson went home that night with his play accepted and a cheque on account for £50 in his pocket.

"David Garrick," with Sothern in the name part, was produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, Birmingham, in April, 1864. The first performance seems to have been a very lukewarm success. Sothern was dreadfully despondent and prophesied dismal failure for the piece when produced in London. But such was not the case, for on the last day of the same month it was produced at the Haymarket Theatre, achieved an enormous success, and has ever since held its place of perennial popularity. Sothern's performance of David Garrick, especially in the famous drunken scene, was a masterpiece, which

has never been surpassed, though it has surely been equalled by Sir Charles Wyndham's performance in the same character, which has held our stage for so long, and doubtless helped Sir Charles round many a difficult corner in the precarious business of running a theatre.

"David Garrick" is obviously the work of a dramatist who has had much practical experience of the stage. It is a first-rate acting play, offering magnificent opportunity to the leading character, and several excellent ones to the minor characters; all of them comedy by the way; Garrick has all the tragedy, as he probably did in real life. The story is, of course, highly improbable, but not by any means impossible where Garrick was concerned. The construction of the play, as published, is ridiculous and full of the most absurd stage licences. Garrick, after accepting Alderman Ingot's invitation, goes home, changes his clothes and is back again in something less than ten minutes! About the same amount of time elapses between his extraordinarily effective exit after the drunken scene, and Squire Chivy's return from the club, with the relation of David's doings at that place, doings that must have taken at least half an hour. The duel in the last act is equally impossibly brief, and Squire Chivy and old Ingot pop in and out of Garrick's rooms, and Ada in and out of faints, like messengers on the Stock Exchange. But the audiences of those days either consciously or unconsciously, probably the latter, shut their eyes to these kind of discrepancies and artificialities, and so did Tom Robertson; giving few hints, as yet, of the drastic reforms he was afterwards to initiate. At the same time there is a certain crispness, brevity and yet naturalness about the dialogue of "David Garrick" which promises very well. And the pretty sentiment, healthy

heart motive, and extremely sound moral, are all typical of Tom Robertson!

But the play is very much altered since it was first written; the above-mentioned weak places have all been strengthened, the comedy lengthened, and it is now, especially when played by Sir Charles Wyndham, almost convincing. It would be interesting to see an array of prompt books and to know to whom all these alterations and improvements are due; hands innumerable, I expect, from the author and Sothern to Wyndham himself. And the perennial popularity of the play is probably due to this. There are some plays which are never finished, the kind that depend absolutely upon the theatre, and have no place in the library except to a practical student of the drama. "David Garrick" is one of them. There will always be somebody longing to play it, and occasionally some one who can play it. It will generally have to be re-dressed before production, if the romantic story which is the attraction is to be made convincing.

Robertson determined to follow up the success of "David Garrick" by writing another play for Sothern. The result was "Society" and the part of Sydney Daryl, a character after Sothern's own heart, and suggested, in a sense, by the character of Garrick. Other characters in the play were written to fit the different members of the Haymarket company. Now this is sometimes thought an artistic crime, but surely it is not necessarily so, as long as the characters that are written are real and true to life. To draw an utterly impossible being, impossibly heroic and impossibly good, because Mr. Swash Buckler wants all the glory and all the sympathy for himself, or to take the fat out of some other character's mouth and stick it into his, is, of course,

criminal. But to draw real living characters, that you know can be done justice to by a certain company surely robs art of nothing and allies it, as all art should be allied, to wisdom and practicality. The artist not only gives birth to a child but sees that it is properly provided for. This is not pandering to the multitude but feeding them. Shakespeare, at any rate, was not above doing this thing, and his ability to do it was not the least wonderful of his many marvellous gifts. A dramatist writes a play and when he has finished it, thinks about casting it. To his horror he finds there is no one that can play it, therefore either no one is ever to be a penny better for it but himself, or it is to be left to future generations to be appreciated. But they will have to do without the author's presence, and the play is almost bound to suffer. On the other hand, is it not better for all if the dramatist writes a play that will be seen, and that *he will see*. He clips his wings a little that others may keep up with him. He leads where he can be followed. He is no farther from heaven than he was before, and the rest of the crowd are much nearer.

So Robertson wrote his next play to suit the company that had served him so well in "David Garrick". When it was read to the management Sothern was delighted with it, but Buckstone pronounced it "rubbish!" Whereupon Sothern paid Robertson £30 as a retaining fee, telling him that he hoped to be able to do it some day in the country, but that it would be quite impossible to do it at the Haymarket whilst Buckstone objected. A few nights later Sothern wrote again to Robertson telling him that there was such a little prospect of "Society" ever being played by him, that he had better try and place it elsewhere. So it went the round of the London managers, including Benjamin Webster and

Alfred Wigan, but it was refused everywhere, and Robertson was again in the depths of despair. But H. J. Byron believed in it and cordially recommended it to Alexander Henderson of the Prince of Wales' Theatre, Liverpool. After an anxious period, during which they feared they had lost it, Mr. and Mrs. John Billington, to whom Robertson had lent the manuscript to read, succeeded in routing it out, and Robertson hastened off hot-foot to read it to Henderson, who was delighted and accepted it on the spot. But it was pledged with Sothern for £30, and neither Robertson nor Byron, although times were not nearly so hard with either as they used to be, could lay hands on a sum like that; but William Belfort, actor, Bohemian, habitué of the Arundel Club, who was so popular that he could lay his hands upon anything he wished, found the money, and the play was free. Poor Tom, he even had to get his plays out of pawn when they were wanted.

It was produced on 8 May, 1865, at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, Liverpool, and was an immediate and unqualified success, and the first royalties drawn by Robertson went to pay off Belfort in cash, who was already more than repaid in kind by his friend's success.

Amongst the audience on the first night was a young actor called John Hare, who took an immediate and violent fancy to the part of Lord Ptarmigant, little dreaming at the time, perhaps, that in playing it himself he was to lay the foundation of his reputation as an actor. A foundation that was very well and truly laid.

To Robertson the Liverpool triumph meant very much more than a mere provincial success, for if it did not yet discover him to the London public, his name was eagerly whispered amongst London managers. His next work was the libretto of an opera called

"Constance," which, to the music of Frederick Clay, was produced at Covent Garden, and resulted in a mild success, most of which was undoubtedly due to the musician.

And now, just as life was beginning to brighten a little for the author, he was stricken down by a sad blow from which, it is thought, he never thoroughly recovered. His beautiful and devoted wife died, on 14 August, 1865, at the early age of twenty-nine. For some time past she had been in a delicate state of health, but insisted upon playing her part at Astley's Amphitheatre, where she was engaged as leading lady. Robertson did his best to dissuade her, even going so far as to send some friends to the theatre to hiss her performance, but, disarmed alike by her beauty and her art, they could only applaud.

Poor Tom was left a widower with two small children dependent upon him.

Fate had no sooner dealt him this cruel wound, when it proceeded to patch it, and, it must be admitted, patched it handsomely. Byron, who was concerned with Marie Wilton in the management of the little Prince of Wales' Theatre off Tottenham-Court Road—formerly known as the "Dust Hole," and where, it will be remembered, Tom and his wife had first met each other—induced Marie Wilton to read "Society". She was delighted with it, and on 11 November, 1865, it was produced for the first time in London. That was a red-letter day in the lives of several people, to say nothing of the English Drama. It was the stepping-stone to fame of Miss Marie Wilton, now Lady Bancroft, as a manageress (she was already at the top of the tree as an actress), Mr. Sydney Bancroft, now Sir Squire Bancroft, of Mr. John Hare, now Sir John Hare, and of

Tom Robertson, who would certainly have been raised to equal, if not higher dignities, had he lived to the present day.

The cast was different in all respects save one, Miss Sophie Larkin, from that which played in Liverpool. Marie Wilton was the new Maud Hetherington, Sydney Bancroft Sydney Daryl, John Hare Lord Ptarmigant and John Clarke John Chodd. The play was an immediate and unqualified success, Robertson's name was on everybody's lips, and the whole town went horn-mad after the little theatre off Tottenham-Court Road as they had done more than a hundred years before to a little theatre in Goodman's Fields, where a young man called David Garrick was giving marvellous performances of "Richard III" and other plays! But the circumstances were different at the Prince of Wales' and in some ways better. It was not one actor that attracted, but a whole company, not some old plays, but a new one. And it now became clear to Robertson that a kindly fate had intervened to prevent his play being played by the old Haymarket company, admirable though that company was. His new wine would never have done for those old bottles. It was too delicate, and too effervescing, and would probably have burst all of them, except perhaps the perennially young Sothern. But Marie Wilton, her husband and her company thought as Tom thought, saw eye to eye with him, submitted entirely to, or rather concurred in his methods of stage management and production, and the result was a perfect performance of a work that was very nearly perfect in its own little way, was quite unlike anything that London had ever seen before, and its short and crisp speeches and simple love story, played in the dull lamp-lighted twilight and be-

hind the prosaic railings of a London square, was a welcome and refreshing change after the turgid and tedious blank verse twaddle of the early Victorian heroes and heroines. The famous "Owl's Roost" scene, a scene at a Bohemian literary club, in which Tom introduced and sketched many of his fellow celebrities and boon companions, far from giving offence, as some had feared, gave unmitigated pleasure to hundreds who knew the originals, and to thousands who did not but would like to have, after that.

Robertson's idea of effectiveness was, in some respects, as we have already seen, modelled upon that of "David Garrick," and the author sought to do as well by Grub Street as he had done by Maiden Lane! In the one case he had contrasted the genuine unfettered life of the theatre with the artificial, convention-bound existence, it could scarcely be called "life," of the city. In the other he brought the stilted, stiff life of a certain section of society into disastrous comparison with the free, easy and warm-hearted life of literary and journalistic Bohemia. In both plays Cupid, who ought surely to be depicted as a Colossus, spans the gulf between the real and the unreal. In both plays the hero gets drunk, or appears to be and creates a scene; in "David Garrick" he is only acting, in "Society" he is overwrought. "David Garrick" may be a better play from the point of view of a star-actor, but in every other respect "Society" is vastly its superior. It is a better, more evenly balanced work of art, the characters are very much more true to life. In "David Garrick," with the exception of Garrick himself and possibly Ada, the characters, though fine acting parts, are all well-worn old stage types; but in "Society" they are most of them new, or were so, for they have all

become old by now. And they are not only new but real; alive and natural, excepting perhaps for the hero, whose tears and distress are almost as trying to his audience as to himself. But Tom Stylus, the other owls, the Chodds, and Lord and Lady Ptarmigant, especially the former, are delightful. There is no doubt a good deal of artificial sentiment in evidence, but it was so in these mid-Victorian times. It must be remembered when criticizing "Society" that it was the first play of its kind and was as superior in the naturalness of dialogue, sentiment, construction and situation to its predecessors as it is inferior to its successors. In construction it is very much superior to "David Garrick" though inferior to "Ours," "School" and above all, "Caste". Things are not taken quite so much for granted as they are in "Garrick" and the audience is not put under too great a strain. At the same time the classic unities are not so closely followed as in "Garrick". Robertson never did care much about them. The action, it can scarcely be called such, spreads over a good deal of time and a good many places. Things are beautifully fixed up all round at the finish, and Sydney Daryl marries Maud Hetherington and becomes a baronet, which seems to be all that was wanted to complete their happiness and that of their audience.

But it was not only the wit, humour and sentiment of the play that drew all London to see it, but the manner of its production; the acting and the stage-management, in both of which the author was the leading spirit. The rooms in Lord Ptarmigant's house looked like the rooms in a nobleman's house, not like the "Owl's Roost" with the furniture placed differently and a few table-cloths, curtains and things turned inside out to make a change. There must either be

realism or imagination on the stage. A half-way house is very dangerous. Robertson, fed and nurtured on the half-a-loaf system, went for realism and saw that he got it. And the audiences went for it too, and liked it, and Robertson and the Bancrofts became the fashion, the little "Dust Hole" off the Tottenham-Court Road became the centre of light and learning and the Mecca of actors and playgoers alike. "Society" ran for upwards of 150 nights, sharing the programme, the lion's share, with the burlesque of "Don Giovanni" by Robertson's old friend and mentor, H. J. Byron. On the one hundreth night Robertson, who never forgot an adverse criticism, sent Buckstone a box!

Meantime he had been working hard on another play, destined to follow and even eclipse "Society" in success and popularity. This was "Ours". It was first tried, as "Society" had been, at Mr. Henderson's little theatre in Liverpool, with the difference that this time it was played by Miss Marie Wilton and her London company. It was produced on 23 August, 1866, and was, like "Society," an immediate and unqualified success. Robertson was far too nervous to avail himself of the box placed at his disposal by the management, and spent the time whilst the play was in progress tramping the streets of Liverpool, pale as death, hatless, and breathless. He was only found with the greatest difficulty and after search parties had been sent out in all directions, and dragged unwillingly to the theatre and, still more unwillingly, on to the stage to face the frantic applause and frenzied shouts of "Author". The whole affair seems to have been a most pleasant, and partly unexpected, surprise to all concerned; for, strange to say, neither Robertson nor the actors seem to have been very sanguine about the success of the play.

When Robertson first read it to the company, there were, it is said, murmurs of discontent. It was looked upon as a one-part play and that part Hugh Chalcot; whilst Hare at first flatly refused to play the part intended for him, Prince Perovsky, and only ultimately did so on Robertson's asking him to "as a personal favour". But in spite of the company's and the author's fears "Ours" was an unqualified success from the moment the curtain rose until it fell, and London more than endorsed Liverpool's verdict. What Lancashire thought to-day, London certainly thought to-morrow in this case. After the play had been produced at the little Prince of Wales' on the 15th of the following September, Robertson found himself occupying the position of the acknowledged leading dramatist in London.

The ingredients of the comedy are much the same as those of "Society" and especial and marked use is made of the favourite recipe "contrast"! It is used here in a more violent form than in "Society" or "David Garrick". The characters one and all are transported from summer England to the Crimea in the depths of winter. The famous third act scene in the hut is generally regarded as the weakest part of the play, and so it is so far as the writing is concerned, but with its excellent production, and Marie Wilton's clever gagging, and the novelty, it became the principal drawing scene of the play. The long arm of coincidence was generally thought to have been stretched a little too far, in this case, but if things are improbable, they are certainly not impossible. After all it is, I believe, a historical fact that many ladies did go out to the Crimea to visit their relations at the front; and it is not surprising that all the ladies in this play should find their way to the home

of those whom they went out to see. But the presence on the scenes of Prince Perovsky, who ought to have been on the other side, is certainly a very fortuitous circumstance. However, Robertson sinned in good company, and greater writers than he have sinned very much more grievously in this respect. The characters are all sketched in the usual simple Robertsonian method, the subsidiary love affair of Mary Netley and Hugh Chalcot, however, completely eclipsing in interest that of the hero and heroine, Angus MacAlister and Blanche Haye. Fortunately for Hugh Chalcot he gets wounded in the leg; somebody had to be comically wounded, but scarcely the hero! So Hugh has to stay at home in the hut, whilst the others go out to fight. Whilst they get all the fight, he, in theatrical parlance, gets all the fat; especially when Mary Netley appears on the scene, and they start to make a roley-poley pudding with it. Here Robertson was faced with a fearful dilemma out of which he extricates himself in a manner that is more ingenious than convincing. There must of course be a comedy love-scene between Chalcot and Mary. The situation, the audience, and the vested interests of everybody concerned demands and commands it. The question before the author is how is it to be done; how is the hut to be cleared for action. A shrapnel shell might do it, but then some one might get killed and all characters are wanted for the end of the play! Chalcot leads up to the solution. "After dinner," says he, during the picnic, "we can go to the opera." (*The distant rumble of the guns is heard.*)

"What's that?" says Lady Shendryn.

"The overture!" says Chalcot!

Splendid, nothing could be better! most telling! We are now prepared for *anything!* And a few

moments later all the unwanted characters put on their wraps and shawls and go out under the escort of Sergeant Jones, who, as the father of twins, should know better, to Flagstaff Hill, ostensibly to watch the parade, but the audience and the sergeant know that there will be fighting. But one of the objects of a play is to create an illusion, and by his extraordinary cleverness and easiness Robertson really succeeds in making all this seem quite real and convincing. I have twice seen this scene played and each time the incongruity, indeed the absurdity, did not fully dawn upon one until after the curtain had fallen. And here lies the secret of Robertson's art. By his wonderful naturalness of dialogue, deftness of construction and general persuasive charm he casts a spell over his audience like an Eastern juggler, and after that can do what he likes with their imagination. Afterwards when they come to their senses they may wonder how they could be so taken in, but if they meet Robertson again, he will do it again. Not that Robertson always exercised his faculties in this way, but if he had set his mind on getting a certain effect, he was not always too particular how he got it, though he was particular enough as to how it was got by the actors, and in "Ours" they served him right well and he wrote to Marie Wilton: "For the first time in my life I felt grateful to the folks on the stage side of the footlights, and I am not given to that sort of gratitude".

It is a pity he was not. "David Garrick" and "Society" had both given him good reason to be so.

I think the real weak point of "Ours" is the quarrel between Sir Alexander and Lady Shendryn, or, to be exact, its cause. It would have been far better to have had Lady Shendryn an ordinary, quarrelsome, unreasonable shrew with no real grounds or justification for

quarrelling with her husband (it must be admitted, however, that he gets his own back, as a rule, in conversation) beyond those of her own nature. This might be cured by the Crimea, or the husband mercifully released by a stray shell which carries off him—or her!

But "Ours," as a play, has, like most of Robertson's, no lack of weak points when one comes to read it, and no lack of strong ones when one sees it played. As a natural consequence of the success of "Ours," Robertson found himself beset with commissions from different managers to write them plays.

He, of course, began a new comedy for the Prince of Wales', and he now undertook a drama for the Princess's, and a couple of two-act comedies, one for the St. James' Theatre, then under the management of Miss Herbert, and the other for the German Reeds' entertainment. Of these "A Dream of Venice" for the German Reeds, seems to have been the most successful. "Shadow Tree Shaft," the drama, was a lukewarm success, as his dramas usually were, his gentle methods being scarcely suited to drama. "A Rapid Thaw," produced at the St. James' Theatre, turned out a very rapid frost, and was a dismal failure. Robertson, who suffered unnecessarily and absurdly acutely from any adverse criticism, obtained full compensation for this disaster a few days later, when, on 6 April, 1867, his new comedy "Caste" was produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre. This play at once marked the high-water mark of his peculiar talent, and has since become a classic. The story is as old as the hills; most of Robertson's are. It occurs in some form or other in most melodramas. But what took the town by storm was the author's method of treating and dressing, or rather undressing it; for he

stripped it of all those absurd fal-lals and fripperies in which stories like this one had generally been served up, and presented it quite simply in two scenes only; the poverty-stricken little home in Stangate, and D'Alroy's quite unpretentious lodgings in Mayfair. No baronial hall, empire drawing-room or tessellated marble terrace, nothing to offer the smallest opportunity to the scene-painter, or to distract the attention of the audience from the play itself. Robertson believed in correctness but not tinsel and glitter. He knew that magnificence of scenery, property and dresses, far from being a help to a certain kind of play, often kill it, as simple beauty may be ruined by over-dressing. In "Caste" he makes his accustomed use of the value of contrast, he does not by any means depend upon it, and the most telling points of the play are those which the different characters have in common. The author sets out to show that

> True hearts are more than coronets
> And simple faith than Norman blood,

but does not by any means mean that all four cannot go together, or that the slums have any monopoly of hearts.

> Hearts just as true and fair
> May beat in Belgrave Square
> As in the lowly air
> Of Seven Dials ——

sang W. S. Gilbert, and the hearts of George D'Alroy or Captain Hawtree are quite as sound as those of Esther or Polly Eccles or Sam Gerridge, and very much sounder than that of old Eccles! Even the impossible Marquise is better than he is, ethically, though not nearly as good dramatically. She is, in fact, the weak spot of the play, for she is evidently intended to

be a lady of birth and breeding, but behaves more like a common sort of creature who has married into a very good family and not yet quite got over it.

I cannot help thinking that if Robertson had taken the trouble first to study her, to draw the genuine article, that the scene at the close of the first act, splendidly effective though it is, would have gained immensely. And still more so in the scene in the last act, where the Marquise comes to take away the baby. Imagine her coming into the room, not in her ill-bred, melodramatic, stagily aristocratic manner, but gently and graciously and kindly, with an invitation to Esther and her baby to come and live with her. On Esther's refusal, as she would of course refuse, the Marquise would point out, ever so gently, that to keep the baby in such a house, and in such daily contact with such an influence as old Eccles, is scarcely fair to George's child. Esther, thinking of the child's point of view, might waver. The Marquise would press her point and then, like a wise woman, take her leave, leaving Esther to think things over, returning later for her answer. When she comes back for it she finds George returned!

It may be presumption to attempt to improve upon such a play as "Caste," but one cannot help seeing the mischief that may be done to a good play by one artificial character. Whenever the Marquise is on the stage, one is conscious alike of artifice and artificiality, and of the fine opportunity the dramatist seems to have missed of strengthening his play and his theme by not making her a real lady.

To turn from her to the other characters, even to old Eccles, is refreshing. One and all, they are all delightful, especially Hawtree, Polly and Sam Gerridge; and Robertson shows his sense and artistic restraint in

supplying a lover for Polly, other than Captain Hawtree; but surely the jilting of Hawtree by his own fiancée is a cheap and silly, almost malicious, touch, by which neither play, situation, nor anything else gains anything.

Old Eccles is, of course, a masterpiece, and stands alone amongst Robertson's characters. There is nothing artificial or stagey about him. He is a maudlin, dangerous old drunkard, with all the active, subtle ability for doing mischief that such people often have. Their brains, generally supposed to be quite sodden and incapable of grasping more than one idea at a time and that idea drink, are in reality positively deadly in their capacity for planning and seizing opportunities that will forward their own filthy ends at any cost. One always marvels how a drunkard gets his drinks.

Esther Eccles is by far the best of Robertson's heroines. The others are inclined to be a little insipid, perhaps because they have never yet seen the world. And their first introduction to it is to be marriage, poor things! Even with Tom Robertson's gentle heroes that must have been rather a tall undertaking to begin with. But Esther has seen the world, and fought it, and, moreover, fought it well; so she is a real angel who naturally fears to tread. But she does tread, all the same, as angels do, very gently and carefully, and achieves a triumphant success. Only such a girl as Esther Eccles could do so, and in painting her Tom Robertson is upon very sure ground. She is probably drawn from life. There are many Esther Eccles on the stage. The stage is, in its way, an excellent educator, and when a girl of the people, gentle and sweet-souled by nature, genuinely refined at heart, as the majority are, has acquired by training the external graces of a real lady, the result is likely to be beautiful.

These two characters, Esther and her father, stand alone as peculiar to this play. The remaining characters are all nearly related to other characters in other comedies. Lady Shendryn, Lady Ptarmigant and the Marquise may all be bracketed together. Polly Eccles was a typical Marie Wilton part; the best of them one would have thought, but Marie Wilton thinks otherwise and votes for Naomi Tighe in "School". Captain Hawtree was a capital Bancroft part. The delicious little Cockney Sam Gerridge is perhaps peculiar to this play, though he has a bowing acquaintance with Sergeant Jones and others.

All these characters are beautifully balanced like well-hung pictures upon a wall; though one wonders how the Marquise enjoys being the pendant to old Eccles!

The construction of the play is, in its own peculiar way, far ahead of anything else of Robertson's; excepting perhaps for the finale of the second act, there are few signs of haste. There Robertson seems to have put everything he had into the pot, to ensure a good blow up. But the curtains are wonderfully effective, and it must be borne in mind that in those days the curtain was regarded as being there quite as much for the convenience of the author as for the audience. Nowadays a good author is expected to forget its existence. It is not supposed to be there at all, like the English army of occupation in Egypt, but is an entirely imaginary institution, which helps to give the audience a rest. In the ancient Greek drama, the chorus used to fill this position. After an act was over, they came on and commented upon the play, saving the audience even that much trouble.

The final curtain of "Caste" is capital and divides the honours with the first. In both of them old Eccles

plays an extremely important part, and on re-reading the play nothing seems to me more effective, more true or more artistic than the old drunkard, forgotten and ignored by all in their happiness, slipping unnoticed, save by Hawtree who is at a loose end, to the floor ; unregenerate to the last.

It is to Tom Robertson's eternal credit that he never reformed Eccles. "Caste," as we have seen, marked the climax of Robertson's career as a dramatist. After this supreme effort he took a complete rest and a long holiday, that is to say, long for him—five weeks, on the Continent. Moreover he was meditating a second marriage. His domestic tendencies were as strong off the stage as they were on, and it is not surprising that he could scarcely endure the terrible sense of loneliness caused by the death of his first wife. His second wife was a Miss Rosetta Feist, a German woman from Frankfort, whom he married in the English Consulate in that town on 17 October, 1868. Meantime "Caste" continued playing to enormous houses at the Prince of Wales' and its success had two very far-reaching effects on the theatrical conditions of at least two continents. The first was the sending out of a properly equipped and trained London company into the provinces, which drove the first nail into the coffin of the old stock companies, and was as well received everywhere by the public, as it was badly by the profession. In some towns the theatre proprietors would not open their doors to admit the "Caste" company, which consequently had to find other quarters in public halls and places, with the result that the theatres did not open their doors to anything else that week. It was hard, of course, on the old stock companies, but on the whole, it was probably a change for the better.

The second effect was less pleasant, for "Caste" at any rate. It was most shamelessly pirated in America, by a man called Florence, whose memory was, apparently, as accommodating as his conscience. This man wrote out the play, practically word for word, after hearing it a few times at the Prince of Wales', hurried over to America with the "script," and anticipated and effectively ruined the authorized production at Wallack's Theatre in New York. A lively correspondence, very much to the pirate's discomfort and discredit, ensued between him and Robertson, and the present law of international and dramatic copyright was an indirect result of this incident.

During this year (1868) Robertson wrote two dramas, "For Love, or the Two Heroes," produced at the New Holborn Theatre on 5 October, and "Passion Flowers," adapted from the French, and with his sister Madge Robertson (Mrs. Kendal) in the principal part, produced at Hull on 28 October. But neither of these plays was a real success.

However, Robertson was being very well compensated by the very successful run which the successor of "Caste" was enjoying at the Prince of Wales' Theatre.

This was "Play," produced on 15 February, 1868. It is a pretty, if rather stilted, love-story; obviously inspired by Robertson's own second marriage romance. The scene is laid in and around Baden, and the second act was a beautiful representation by Hawes Craven of the "Alte Schloss". Robertson also introduced an incident of which he had the good fortune to be an eye-witness on his tour, of the bank being broken at the gaming tables. Rosie, the part played by Marie Wilton in this comedy, was rather more of an insipid miss than usually fell to her lot, but she doubtless got

very much more out of it than there appears to be in it. The play which had a very good run indeed would probably have done very much better still if it had not been for a very exceptionally hot summer which caused practically every theatre in London to close its doors.

The next play was "Home," a three-act comedy, founded upon the French of "L'Aventurière" by Emile Augier.

It was produced under Buckstone's management, with Sothern in the leading part, at the Haymarket Theatre on 14 January, 1869, and became an established favourite, though it is difficult to see why, for it is really very poor stuff indeed. There is, however, one very amusing scene, the mock love scene between Alfred Dorrison, the prodigal, and Mrs. Pinchbeck, the adventuress. But the construction and methods employed by the author to put the audience *au fait* with the situation are naïve and elementary in the extreme. Soliloquies, of course, abound; but Robertson should, by this time, have been superior to the old dodge of making his characters give each other information that they already obviously know, because the audience do not. However, this pinchbeck, artificial comedy was succeeded two days later by something very much better, for on 16 January "School" was produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, with such phenomenal success that it ran on its first production for 381 performances, and was afterwards repeatedly revived with almost equal success. Indeed, financially, it is said to have been very much the most profitable of all the Robertson comedies produced during the Bancroft régime. Although the plot was, as Robertson admitted, to some small extent suggested by Benedix's "Aschenbrodel" (Cinderella), the play was practically original and like

"Play" owed something to Robertson's own personal experiences. Mr. Krux, the wicked usher at Dr. Sutcliffe's Academy, as we have seen, was inspired by Robertson's colleague in the unfortunate early experience in Utrecht. Robertson took a very bitter revenge.

Reading the play, one realizes very clearly the success of "School" must have owed much to its interpreters. It is fresh, pretty, and artless; and remarkably like the day-dream of a romantic schoolgirl, but that scarcely seems to be the sort of material upon which to build a success surpassing that of "Ours," or even "Caste". But the Bancroft company succeeded in doing it, Marie Wilton especially achieving one of the great successes of her career in her favourite part of Naomi (Nummy) Tighe, the heiress.

However, this great success was not entirely due to the acting, for the play itself, when seen upon the stage, does undoubtedly exercise a certain peculiar fascination. Not long ago the present writer saw it played by a company which, excellent though it was, can scarcely have been equal to that at the old Prince of Wales'. At first the play seemed the baldest, feeblest, most amateurish stuff imaginable, and one wondered how one's grandfathers and grandmothers can possibly have been gripped and interested by such trash, but as the evening wore on one found oneself gradually coming under the spell, under the charm of its freshness and sentimentality. One's salad days came back to one, and then one saw in a flash where the real genius of Robertson and the company that represented him lay. It all lay in their imaginations. The author was a man who had never had his fair share of the fresh, green, sunny side of life. The sun of the limelight, the green of the green room,

and the freshness of new grease paint had been more in his way, if not in his line. And very much the same could be said for his company, most of whose lives, and especially that of the sunniest and brightest of them all, Marie Wilton, had been passed in the artificial atmosphere of the theatre. But they had all lived in their imagination, where hard workers and dwellers in towns and cities so often find their happiness, and such genuine happiness. Not in the loveliest glade in the world will you find brighter eyes, or happier expressions than may sometimes be found in a London slum. Robertson had tapped this well of imagination, his company drank of it and dispensed it to audiences that too had become thirsty, whilst the mere men amongst them became, for once, dissatisfied with themselves, and envious of the extraordinary, simple, pure, trusting romances of a parcel of schoolgirls. A boy's day-dream is, generally, that he may be successful in killing somebody; a girl's that some one may come along and marry her. Both have their points and both their selfishness, but somehow one felt very strongly that the two men, Lord Beaufoy and Jack Poyntz, who fluttered this particular dovecot, were a couple of hawks. This piece of linked sweetness was, as we have seen, very long drawn out. To do it justice, it was really more than mere sweetness, for it is light, bright, and witty. For the excellent and witty examination scene we are partly indebted to young "Tommy" Robertson, whose father used to draw him out, but if some of the answers to Dr. Sutcliffe's questions were his he must have been a precocious child. "School" was succeeded by a new four-act drama, which was first produced at Liverpool under the title of "My Lady Clara" and later at the Gaiety Theatre, London, under the management of John Hollingshead and the title of

"Dreams". It achieved a very fair measure of success, running into close upon one hundred nights.

The next production was a farce entitled "A Breach of Promise," produced at the Globe Theatre on 10 April, 1869. It is very funny in its mechanical way, a way that would not be permitted nowadays, when even farces have to carry some sort of conviction and be played with some sort of naturalness and probability to be successful. The old "concocted" farce had its innings and a good innings whilst it lasted, but it was bowled out soon after the old punning burlesques and the vice and virtue, black and white melodramas, which can now only make runs on a few very bad county cricket pitches.

One of his early plays, a comedietta called "Dublin Bay," of which he had sold the rights many years before, was now produced, on the strength of his present reputation, at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, where it apparently achieved a very mild measure of success, strictly in accordance with its merits. Once again the fact was brought home, which so few people seem able to face, that neither the reputation of its author, nor even the excellence of the acting, will succeed in bluffing the public into being interested when they are not. Once the curtain is up *the play is the thing*, and if that, be it comedy, farce or drama, does not succeed in *interesting* one audience it will not draw many more, and nothing will make it.

The next important production was a play called "Progress," produced at the Globe on 18 September, 1869. It was originally written for the Haymarket Theatre to the order of Buckstone.

"My God!" said Buckstone, when it was read to him for the first time, "they are all old people in it!"

"Why not?" said Robertson. "I've written it for your company."

And so he undoubtedly had, for the play itself, besides consisting mainly of old characters, has many a sly dig at the old order of things, which it may safely be presumed still existed to a certain extent at the Haymarket, and Robertson, whose cynicism swamped his wisdom, had evidently never quite forgiven Buckstone for his refusal of "Society". The result of the present encounter was, not unnaturally, the refusal of "Progress". But Buckstone was not wise. It had a very fair success at the Globe, and would have probably had a still greater one at the Haymarket, with Buckstone and son as Bunnythorne and son. With the exception of "David Garrick" and the four great Prince of Wales' successes, "Caste," "Ours," "School," and "Society," it seems to me very much the best of the Robertsonian series. The plot and situations are very good in their way, the dialogue excellent, though at times a little "tiradey". The characters are always making violent tirades. In its methods of construction this play shows a further advance. It actually opens without a soliloquy, and two characters lay out the plot by telling each other things that they do not know already!

The next production, Robertson rained plays just now, was a drama called "The Nightingale," written for Mr. Benjamin Webster and the Adelphi Theatre. It was a dreadful failure, owing partly to the fact that Robertson's gentle and delicate methods were not at all suited to that great house; and also to his state of health, which was now so bad as to interfere sadly with his abilities, and prevent him doing his best. The cause was heart trouble in a very serious form, and the anti-

dote which he insisted upon taking, in the face of all opposition, was work.

Lady Bancroft, in her reminiscences, gives us a very vivid and painful account of the first night of "The Nightingale," at which Robertson insisted on being present. His anxiety and anger at the reception of his play were alike unnatural, and it was very evident he was not himself.

The following 23 April, 1870, "M.P.," a comedy in four acts, was produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre. This was the last new comedy from his prolific, too prolific, pen to be presented at that famous little theatre. For the first time in his life Robertson was too ill to be able to superintend the rehearsals and to be present at the first performance. But the splendid little company understood his requirements so thoroughly, that he was not so much missed at rehearsal as he was from his customary box on the first night. But he got much comfort and happiness from the messages and news of the triumphal progress of the play, which were continually sent to his bedside by the ever kind and thoughtful management. The comedy played to packed houses for a hundred and sixty performances, until well on in the summer when the run was broken, that the management might follow their invariable and wise custom of taking a summer vacation. On re-opening for the autumn season the run of "M.P." was resumed, but the spell was broken, the comedy failed to attract. I think the explanation is simple. "M.P." is not nearly equal to the other Prince of Wales' successes; the end especially is very poor. The Bancrofts and their company possibly realized this and worked with a will to cover up the defects by the excellence of their acting, and the kindly thought succeeded for a time, as such

plans deserve to succeed, and undoubtedly prolonged the author's life and happiness for some months, but the material was too thin to be re-woven, once the thread was broken.

On 5 October, 1870, Sothern produced at the New Theatre, Bristol, a comedy in three acts entitled "Birth," by Robertson. It is an amusing, artificial little comedy on somewhat well-worn lines, on the eternal subject of "Caste". Paul Hewitt is a wealthy manufacturer, who eventually succeeds in buying up the blue-blooded but empty walleted Earl of Eaglecliffe, lock, stock, and barrel. But Paul falls in love with the Lady Adeliza, the Earl's sister, and the Earl is, as all Earls should be, scandalized at such a match, especially as he himself is in love with Paul's plebeian sister, Sarah. However, things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another, and the upshot may easily be guessed. There is a double-wedding, and blood and brains, beauty and business, are all blended in blissful bondage! The situation is obviously too absurd to be taken seriously, and Robertson evidently did not take it too seriously, and wrote the play with his tongue in his cheek—(evidently the right way to write a play for Sothern)—for he introduced the character of an imaginary dramatist, who is pulling the strings of the puppets in the background. This character, Jack Randall by name, was played by Sothern himself. At first Sothern was delighted with the play and the character, as the public also appeared to be. Later interest on both their parts seemed to dwindle, and Sothern got more and more anxious and afraid of producing the piece in London. Finally, it was arranged that Robertson should overhaul the whole play again before its London production. But he died before this could be done. After the production of

"Birth" he had become very ill indeed. Early in January he went to Torquay, acting under medical advice, but there the vile weather and utter loneliness made him if anything worse than before. He returned to town a wreck, scarcely able to move one foot before the other. A few days later, on 16 January, 1871, his last play "War" was produced at the St. James' Theatre. It was doomed to failure from the outset; a poor play, badly acted, and produced at a most inauspicious time, when every one took sides and nobody could judge a Franco-German situation impartially. It is always dangerous to produce a play upon a subject that strongly divides public opinion. A dramatic author may ride on the crest of the wave, if he likes, but if he attempt to form a breakwater he and his play will very likely be swamped.

Robertson, who was now in far too critical and dangerous a condition to leave the house, had news brought to him hourly of the play's reception. Consequently it became necessary to deceive him, but he extracted the painful truth from his son Tommy, who paid frequent visits from his boarding school to his father's bedside. When the whole truth came out Robertson sank back on his pillow and exclaimed: "Ah, Tommy, my boy, they wouldn't have been so hard if they could see me now. I shan't trouble them again." Which, though pathetic, was exceedingly unfair, and hard on "them," and exhibited very plainly the weak spot in Robertson's armour, his dread of criticism. One would have thought a consciously well-equipped and accoutred knight would have welcomed criticism. A few weeks later, on 3 February, 1871, Robertson passed away quite peacefully and quietly in his high-backed chair. He was buried beside his first wife, in Abney Park Cemetery, on 9 Feb-

ruary. The dignified and thoughtful management of the Prince of Wales' Theatre closed their theatre on that evening. So passed Tom Robertson after a fitfully happy life in which there had been very much more rain than sunshine. He used to say that he should like to have the world as a ball at his feet, that he might kick it. But all the same, as far as his writing was concerned, he got, on the whole, real justice done him. A careful examination of his published plays reveals the fact that they almost invariably met with the success their merits deserved, seldom with less, occasionally with more. The most successful of them were undoubtedly the best: "Caste," "Ours," "School," "Society". He wrote very rapidly indeed, too rapidly sometimes; many of his plays showing marks of haste. He wrote altogether forty-five plays, of which fifteen were comedies, seventeen dramas, and eleven farces. To these must be added three novels and miscellanea innumerable. This pace was more excusable in the days when he was forced to sell what he wrote at almost waste-paper prices, but it is a pity he accepted quite so many commissions after he became famous. The charm and delicacy of his work would have been still more beautiful had he lavished more care and time upon it. Of modern dramatists perhaps none resemble him so closely as Sir J. M. Barrie, but Barrie is apparently content to spend more time over fewer plays, and possibly time will return the compliment and treat him rather better than it has Robertson. On the other hand, Barrie is content to be merely a writer, whilst Robertson had other axes to grind. He was a reformer. His plays were, in a sense, a means to an end; they were the hammer by which he was enabled to drive home his wedge.

That was the reason, perhaps, and a very good one too, that he was anxious to write as many as he could and spread them about as much as possible, and had to learn the unpleasant truth that you cannot put new wine into old bottles. All the actors of his time, and it is a subject which they know best, agreed that he was the best stage-manager, or "producer" as we should call him nowadays, of that time.

In order to appreciate his reforms at their full value, one must not only read his plays, but the dramatic history of his day and especially the days preceding him, days which were artificial, stagey, and wordy to the very last degree. In the place of stagey artificiality Robertson gave us naturalness, as it was then understood, and in place of long, prosy, wordy speeches, crisp and natural dialogue; just as, apparently, he insisted upon the mounting and accessories of a play bearing some resemblance to the real thing. Scenery must either be left entirely to the imagination, be properly suggestive or be absolutely correct. If one has a cottage interior to represent three or four different things in one evening, one is apt to get confused, and forget which scene is supposed to be on tap. And if the Duchess exits with all her dignity by the drawing-room door, and the door sticks and the Duchess has to pull twice at the loop of string that does duty for a handle the illusion is apt to be spoilt. It could not be so if there were no door there, and only the Duchess herself could spoil it if the right door were there!

A word as to Robertson's naturalness. Reading his plays nowadays they seem the most artificial, unnatural effusions it is possible to imagine. But it was an artificial, sentimental age. A reaction from the extreme naturalness, in one sense, of the Georgian age. Robert-

son exchanged the artificiality of the *stage* of the time for the artificiality of the *life* of the time. In a sense he jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire, or perhaps one should say out of the fire into the frying-pan, for he, as a dramatist, was in his right place, the business of the stage being to mirror the times.

Mid-Victorian young ladies were not so slow as they looked, nor are present-day ones so fast. Robertson is not one of those dramatists who see far below the surface, but he kept his garden very neat and tidy and pretty, and uprooted a host of noxious weeds; and this is all the more wonderful when we realize that he was a reformer from within, a prophet who had honour in his own country. Some of Robertson's plays are plays that count, "Caste" is a classic; but perhaps his greatest work is the share he undoubtedly had in assisting to restore the drama to its rightful place in Art.

ARTHUR WING PINERO.

Sir Arthur Wing Pinero was born within the sound of Bow Bells in 1855. He was originally intended to follow in his father's profession of the law, but having his own ideas concerning the future, he went upon the stage and made his debut in Edinburgh in June, 1874. Three years later, in 1877, his first play, "£200 a year," was produced. Sometime in the early eighties, whilst playing small parts, and apparently playing them uncommonly well, under Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's management, he definitely retired from the stage as far as acting was concerned, in order to devote all his time and energies to playwriting, with what distinguished success all the world knows.

How many plays Sir Arthur has written in the last thirty-five to forty years, perhaps he alone knows, if he remembers. He has had upwards of fifty produced, of which more than half have been published. I purpose to deal with a selection only of those published, as Sir Arthur is a stern censor of his work, and does not permit publication of anything that he considers falls below the very high standard he has set himself. His repertoire is a very large one and covers an immense deal of ground from broad farce to deep tragedy. Between these two extremes his plays appear to group themselves into three distinct types of comedy, which may severally be described as: the tragi-comedy, the sentimental serial, and the gibe or tilting comedy. The first of these is a type

of play that Sir Arthur has made peculiarly his own, and in which he excels. The plays of this order have not always received the support their merits deserved, principally on account of their very excellence. They are so finely balanced between tragedy and comedy that the audience are on tenterhooks the whole evening, and sighs of relief take the place of cheers at the fall of the curtain. Some folk like being on tenterhooks; the majority do not. I believe Sir Arthur loves them objectively. In some former existence he was perhaps a Dey of Algiers, more soft-hearted than these gentlemen usually were, who held his victims over the hooks, and then did not drop them after all!

The "sentimental serial" is a form of comedy to which strict Aristotleians and dramatic purists may object very strongly, but quite vainly. Unities of time, place, and anything else that is inconvenient are often ignored, and we are presented to some charming little serial stories which would do quite as well for a novel as for the stage.

Lastly comes "the gibe," an unpleasant and, in some ways, unfair business, which would be quite unforgiveable in any but a *very* skilful pair of hands.

Of farces, "The Magistrate," "The Times," "Dandy Dick" and "The Amazons" are, I think, the best examples. Of tragi-comedies, "The Hobby Horse," "The Weaker Sex," "Letty," and, above all, "The Benefit of the Doubt," an admirable play. Of "sentimental serials," "Sweet Lavender" and "Lady Bountiful" are named in their order of merit. "The Wife without a Smile" is an extremely clever, though equally unpleasant gibe.

"The Gay Lord Quex," "Trelawney of the Wells" and "The Princess and the Butterfly" occupy niches all to themselves. The first is a theatrical *tour de force*. Sir Arthur was bound to write such a play. His con-

summate knowledge of the theatre, mastery of his material, and technique were sure to find full expression sooner or later in something like an exhibition break from a great billiard player. "Trelawney of the Wells" may be described as a Robertsonian comedy, and, indeed, the life and early struggles of Tom Robertson were its inspiration. Of "The Princess and the Butterfly" we will speak later.

To begin with the farces. In addition to a vast knowledge of the theatre, strong sense of character, and keen if somewhat cynical sense of humour, Sir Arthur Pinero possesses another very useful qualification for the dramatist, above all for the farcical dramatist; and that is an extraordinary ability to conceive a telling situation. This was remarkable in "The Magistrate," still more so in "Dandy Dick" and in some of the more serious plays.

"The Magistrate" was first produced at the Court Theatre on 21 March, 1885, where it ran for over a year, completely restoring the then somewhat declining fortunes of that little theatre. It is an admirable farce in its own way and though generally broad and far-fetched, the fun is yet unforced and really funny. I am not sure it would not stand revival. It is a little old-fashioned in places, but is not by any means threadbare. Mr. Pinero, as he then was, did one very daring thing, to find a parallel for which we have to go back to Shakespeare and old Greek tragedy. *His climax takes place off the stage!* This is surely the appearance of Mrs. Posket before her husband, in the dock at Mulberry Street Police Court. Like the final scene of Macbeth, the battle with Macduff, or the climax of the Orestean tragedy, it is too terrible to be played before our eyes! In Œdipus when the unfortunate queen kills herself,

we just hear a scream and imagine the rest, and so it is with the above redoubtable encounter. Pinero knew when to stop, and where.

But if the situation, or rather the situations in which Mr. Posket the magistrate finds himself are awkward, they are nothing to that of the Very Reverend Augustine Jedd, D.D., in the farce of "Dandy Dick," the best, I am inclined to think, of the Pinerotic farces. It seems to me very much better than "The Schoolmistress," which immediately preceded it, and certainly better than "The Magistrate". The central idea is stronger and more original, the play is worked out on simpler, broader, and certainly more refined lines than in "The Magistrate". Some time before writing the play Pinero had been turning the central idea over in his mind—the idea of putting a dignified, decorous dean into a dangerous dilemma and an undignified situation. This notion may sound repugnant to some, but they would never find it so if they saw or read the play.

The play is as harmless as it is healthy, and there are no signs of the somewhat mordant and cynical humour which Sir Arthur seems to have developed in some of his later comedies. Owing to a delightfully human and forgivable trait in his own character, the unfortunate Dean finds himself incarcerated in a country "lock-up" for poisoning a horse, the first favourite for an important race. He is in the charge of a modern Dogberry, one Noah Topping, a most truly rural constable whose domestic jealousy and professional zeal, capital ingredients for a farce, are equally well developed. The characterization in "Dandy Dick" is in every way superior to that in "The Magistrate". The Dean, his horsey sister, Georgiana Tidman, otherwise known as George Tidd, Noah and Mrs. Topping, and Sir Tristram

Mardon, are all characters which might be found in real life, a thing that could scarcely be said of those in "The Magistrate". On the other hand, the two young ladies, Salome and Sheba, are as impossible and farcical as their military swains, Major Tarver and Mr. Darbay.

"Dandy Dick" was the last of the farces that Pinero wrote for the Cecil-Clayton management at the Court Theatre. Two years later he again appeared in the bill at a rejuvenated theatre that had risen from the ashes of the old one, with a farce entitled "The Cabinet Minister," produced under the auspices of Mrs. John Wood and Mr. Arthur Chudleigh.

As a farce it is neither so funny nor so purely farcical as any of its predecessors, though perhaps in some ways it comes closer to Sir Arthur's own idea as to what a farce should be, as outlined by Mr. Michael Salaman in his introductory note to the published version of the play. Mr. Pinero, says Mr. Salaman, "holds that farce should treat of probable people placed in possible situations, but regarded from a point of view which exaggerates their sentiments and magnifies their foibles".

Possible but highly improbable people in possible but highly improbable situations is surely a more accurate description. *Impossible* situations practically never occur in Sir Arthur's farces, and that is their strong point. From his point of view he certainly exaggerates his characters' sentiments and magnifies their foibles, sometimes a little unduly and unnecessarily. Take for example "Dandy Dick"; the possible absurdity of the situation in that play gains nothing from the impossible absurdity of his daughter's love affairs.

It seems to me that the central situation of a farce may be as absurd as you please, but the situations arising therefrom, or contributing thereto, should be as

natural and unstrained as possible. On the other hand, of course, the farcical atmosphere must be maintained, but I do not think that it wants *continually* feeding, it is not so voracious as some imagine. "The Cabinet Minister" is not such a good farce as either "The Magistrate" or "Dandy Dick," principally because the main situation is sometimes so serious that one forgets it is supposed to be a farce. Moreover the principal characters are almost impossibly improbable.

In "The Amazons," the last farce which Sir Arthur wrote for the Court, and which was produced there in March, 1893, the author hit on a very happy idea, and worked it out very happily until, I think, about mid-way through the last act. The end seems to me scrappy and hurried, and when the play is over one wants more—what there is is so very good. I cannot help thinking that the idea of "The Amazons" would have yielded a better result if treated less farcically, and certain indications make me think that such an idea may have occurred to Sir Arthur himself. He treats *his* young ladies with such delicate courtesy and chivalry. One feels that he had first conceived the idea of their being brought up as men to be promisingly ridiculous, and then when he came face to face with the pretty dears, had fallen head over ears in love with them, as we all did. But, he is writing a farce. There must be some absurdity somewhere, so he chivalrously makes the men look ridiculous. But then of course there is danger of that reacting upon the girls. By all the canons of comedy and farce girls and men must pair off together at the end of the play. But here Sir Arthur's cleverness and resource come into play, and he sends them off in couples, not to the altar but to the dinner-table, and by virtue of his rank the most ridiculous of them, the

absurd Earl of Tweenways, has to take in the girls' mother. Practically the only match that is assured is the entirely satisfactory one of Lord Litterly and the Lady Noeline. Then, too, the fact that men are such a rarity in the girls' lives is sufficient to excuse and explain the exaggerated view they all take of the specimens that do come their way. On the whole the author extricates himself dexterously and chivalrously from a difficult and delicate position, and one feels that his heart must be as large as his brain.

It is, perhaps, presumptuous to criticize such an expert at all kinds of play-writing as Sir Arthur Pinero; at the same time it does seem to me that as a farce-writer he is a little lacking in one very important qualification. He is not sufficiently light-hearted. He has the defects of his other qualities. He is not able to don or doff at will the masks of comedy or tragedy. Perhaps only a Shakespeare could do that. Pinero's comedy *is* a mask, but his tragedy seems the real thing, the grim face that shows even through the mask of comedy. He has a sense of responsibility and anxiety, and all the time one is watching or reading his farces, one feels what a drama this man could write, if he would only let himself go. But I doubt if any dramatist has ever kept himself so well in hand as Sir Arthur Pinero. His mastery of himself is only equalled by his mastery of his art, and this is nowhere better demonstrated than in the remarkable series of "tragi-comedies".

The first of these was "The Hobby Horse," in which the author skated very dexterously indeed over *very* thin ice. A clergyman is put into the painful position of being in love with another man's wife. But, at the time, he supposes her to be single. Fortunately he is no ordinary person and no ordinary parson, and rises above the

difficulty with the same gentle, chivalrous manliness that he slipped into it. The average person probably, and parson certainly, would have upbraided himself quite unjustly, and suffered agonies from the pinpricks of an unjust, exacting and spoilt conscience. Not so the Reverend Noel Brice, who conducts himself splendidly under these trying conditions. I will give the dialogue. It is worth transcribing.

SPENCER JERMYN (*the wronged (!) husband*). Mr. Brice, Mrs. Jermyn tells me I am to beg your pardon. I do so. I have married a very foolish, headstrong lady —— I beg your pardon. Mrs. Jermyn keeps your niece company and assists you in your parish work without my permission. [*She has done so under the assumed name and status of Miss Moxon.*—ED.] I beg your pardon.

In the meantime you fall in love with my wife, sir, and you ultimately propose marriage to her in my presence—— I beg your pardon.

. . . . . .

NOEL BRICE. Mr. Jermyn, the tone you speak in spares me the pain of thinking that you believe an apology is necessary. As for my—mistake, it is slighter than you imagine.

SPENCER JERMYN. Slighter?

NOEL BRICE. Yes, sir. The only great mistake possible in proposing marriage is to select an unworthy object. I fell into no such error. I believed Miss Moxon to be a generous, warm-hearted lady, whom any man should be proud to call his wife. I thought that and I think it still.

SPENCER JERMYN. (*Pointing to Mrs. Jermyn.*) But your Miss Moxon is Mrs. Jermyn, Mr. Brice!

NOEL BRICE. So I find—and upon that I congratulate you with all my heart.

SPENCER JERMYN. Eh? Oh—thank you!

And so the wind is effectually taken out of the sails of Mr. Spencer Jermyn, and Mrs. Jermyn's self-respect is restored to her through as good a piece of dialogue as was ever written, or spoken either, I'll be bound.

"The Hobby Horse" is, on the whole, I think, a good play, slightly spoiled by its farcical element and the rather unnecessarily long arm of coincidence that restores Spencer Jermyn to his stepson, or rather his stepson to him.

"The Weaker Sex" is a very much better play of the same description, and surely deserves a better fate than it met with when produced in London in the spring of 1889. The provinces were kinder to it than the metropolis, and America took it to her heart. The principal theme of the plot, a mother and daughter in love with the same man, is not, of course, very savoury, but Sir Arthur again skates over it in his characteristic thin ice method. And after all they are not consciously in love with the same man, and there is a long lapse of time between the two outbreaks. As a young girl, Mary Norbury had fallen in love with Philip Lyster, and thinking he was like most other men, had sent him to the right about, principally for the pleasure of whistling him back again. And he went there, for he was not quite like other men, more sensitive and less sensible; and Mary Norbury gave up whistling and chained herself to Lord Vivash. Fortunately death broke the chain, but not till it had begun to chafe badly, and then Lady Vivash began to whistle again, very softly at first and only to herself.

Afterwards she whistled occasionally to a "great friend" and unsuccessful suitor. Presently Philip returned from Colorado under the name and style of Ira Lee, the Poet of the Prairies, bound by an engagement ring to Sylvia, only daughter of Lady Vivash, and the apple of her mother's eye. They had met abroad where Sylvia was travelling with a chaperon, whilst her mother was busying herself at home with female suffrage meetings. Not that she was not a model mother, indeed she was sufficiently model to realize that a bewitching daughter might have a better chance without her equally bewitching mamma. Ira Lee, at first fascinated by what seemed to him a chance resemblance to his early love, was soon chained fast to Sylvia, enslaved in her turn by a genuinely romantic lover. In their many little talks together, fortunately for the dramatist if not for themselves, Sylvia's mother's maiden name had never cropped up, and so the catastrophe comes at the moment when Sylvia first proudly presents her fiancé to her mother. Lady Vivash and Mr. Lee had met earlier in the evening, quite unaware of each other's relationship to Sylvia. The upshot is easily guessed. Philip Lyster was a gentleman and Sir Arthur Pinero is a conscientious dramatist, and so Philip returns to his poems and his prairies and Sylvia and her mother comfort each other as only they can.

When the play was originally produced in the country, Sir Arthur condescended to permit the conventional happy ending, but in London the only possible, and indeed the only possibly happy ending was presented and afterwards published.

With a little re-touching the play might be reproducible and perhaps better appreciated in these less squeamish and more reasonable days. A modern audience

would not shudder at the painful predicament of mother and daughter. Nor would they pass by on the other side. On the contrary they would probably sympathize with and understand, and metaphorically put their arms around the pair.

But the farcical element would never do to-day. Women's Suffrage has become far too serious a matter to joke about, and perhaps there is no more convincing argument in its favour than that it has survived this kind of ridicule. And nowadays its exponents do not, if they ever did, leave their cause in such futile hands as those of Mrs. Boyle-Chewton and Mr. Bargus, M.P. for Skipping-Molton; and not even a place with such a name as that would elect such a member to-day. But if the suffrage question were remoulded and taken very seriously a very gripping play might result. When reading plays such as this, in which some of the characters really live, it is very interesting to clothe them, in one's mind, in modern garments, and sometimes they fit them surprisingly well!

Also "The Weaker Sex" would scarcely do as a title. At least he would be a bold man who would use it, and mean it, at the present time. "The Passer-By" would be a better one. The mention of good titles brings us to "The Benefit of the Doubt," the best of Sir Arthur's tragi-comedies, and one of the very best of the many admirable plays that he has written. All great artists have to learn to obey the rules of their trade before they can learn to break them, and Sir Arthur Pinero is no exception to the rule. The unreasonable and almost inexplicable stage convention that an audience may never be kept in the dark was very effectually slain in the "Benefit of the Doubt". And, like the soliloquy and the aside, it has never been missed, excepting per-

haps by a few lame or decrepit dramatic authors trying to get along without those crutches.

Mrs. Theophila Fraser has come out of the Divorce Court unconvicted, and given the benefit (?) of the doubt. Has it ever been a benefit to anybody in this wicked world? Poor Theophila certainly never got the benefit, but got the ban of it. Her last state was worse than her first. Even the whispering tongue of scandal was better than the pompous pronouncement from the President of the Divorce Court. Of course some of us in court, privileged persons who really knew the lady and had had a glimpse of her golden heart, never had a moment's doubt of her innocence, and incapability of such a sordid crime. And the malicious woman, Mrs. Allingham, who put her through the court, never had any doubt of her innocence either, and was wildly jealous of it; as she was of everything and everybody else. But Theophila's own husband and some of her friends, save the mark! had their doubts and gave her the full benefit of them.

This, then, is the principal situation of the play. A nice woman finds herself in a nasty position, as the result of her having been in another position which was altogether too good for this wicked world. This is a promising situation for a painful and intensely interesting play, and the author makes the most of it. It is all developed very naturally and reasonably, a process which is by no means usual with dramatic authors who are too prone to rack their brains for the unexpected and unnatural. After the trial the woman turns for comfort to her husband, from whom she gets as cold a douche as ever came down from the chilliest summit of his highland estates. What more natural than that she should then turn to the friend whose sturdy friendship has unwittingly been the cause of the trouble? But

unfortunately there has been a reconciliation between that friend and his wife. That is to say an outward reconciliation, for the friend is still a friend, and many years must pass ere his wife can make full restitution. And now? to make matters worse and delay them still further, she suggests an eaves-dropping scene. She shall be allowed to overhear the interview between her husband and the other woman. The husband consents, for the other woman's sake, knowing how she will justify herself, but warns his wife of the degrading meanness of her action. The interview takes place. Theophila, the other woman, of course justifies herself until, overcome by the excitements of the day, she drinks some champagne. As she has had nothing to eat or drink all day but gall and wormwood, she not unnaturally loses her self-control and says some things that she does not mean and others that she does. Then the fat is in the fire, but there is really not such a blaze up as there might be, because the fat is very lean, and everyone knows it is.

The end is, as it is bound to be, a patched-up affair. Theophila makes her final exit on the arm of a Bishop, in the light of whose countenance she is to make her *rentrée* into society—with a very small s ! This end is comforting, not to Theophila, but to the other characters who have mixed themselves up in her affairs, and are, by this time, thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Theophila's consolation consists in the fact that she really cares no longer for the world's opinion, good, bad, or indifferent. And that is really the only possible ending to such an affair. She might have gone out and committed suicide, she had few inducements to remain in this world, but the situation was not worth that. She might have gone off with the man, but when two

people have gone so far to the good they cannot easily go to the bad. So she just remained where she was, head and shoulders above the rest of her world.

Taking it all round, "The Benefit of the Doubt" is perhaps the best play that Sir Arthur has given us. It seems to me more complete, better balanced, less stagey in characterization and less pedantic in conversation than any of the others. It will be probably unearthed and played again, and better played than it was on its first production. If Sir Arthur Pinero had never done anything else, the authorship of this play alone would probably have eventually ensured him the very high place he now holds among English dramatists.

"Letty" may perhaps be classed with the tragi-comedies. It only just escapes being very grim tragedy indeed. Poor Letty has two very narrow escapes from falling, first, into the arms of the unspeakable Bernard Mandeville, and then into the clutches of the decadent and contemptible Neville Letchmere. Early in his career Sir Arthur wrote a play called "Daisy's Escape". "Letty" might have been called "Letty's Escapes," but such a title would have told too much and ruined the tension at the close of the third act, the period of the second escape. Poor Letty has a very, very narrow squeak. In fact it is almost too near to be convincing, and sails so close to the wind that there is a suspicion of flapping. But giving this situation the full "benefit of the doubt," the fourth act is a sheer joy. Of course the long arm of coincidence plays a large part in it, but not too large, I think, not larger than it might have done in life. There are those that hold that everything we have done wrong pursues us like the "hound of Heaven," until we set it, or see it, in its true light. The broken figure of Letchmere and the built-up one of Letty in

this last act seem to me beautifully drawn and very real. Every woman is said to have a tender spot in her heart for the man that has used her ill, but perhaps she has a still tenderer one for the man from whose clutches she has escaped, even though it be through no fault of his own. I think that, on the whole, "Letty" is a good play and Letty a beautiful character. Perhaps one wonders a little how Sir Arthur arrived at his opening situation, and how Letchmere got so far with Letty and her friends, without getting farther. Such a man usually begins separating his quarry from the rest of the pack, or else he begins at the end. Perhaps it is the "hound of Heaven" again and a subtle scheme for the salvation of Letchmere. It proves so and it does no harm to Letty in the long run. If Sir Arthur has a little weakness it sometimes appears to be an unconvincing opening situation. He seems to begin with the situation instead of arriving at it, so to speak. This is especially noticeable in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray". On the other hand, in both "Iris" and "His House in Order," two of the finest plays, great care is taken to explain and arrive legitimately at the situation, in which we first find the characters. There is, it is true, an explanation in "Letty," but it is not altogether a satisfactory one. However, it is a fine play that has only got two weak spots in it. Much of the character drawing in "Letty" is surely very good indeed. She herself is, as we have seen, beautifully drawn, and her companions, especially Hilda Gunning, Marion Allardyce and the unspeakable Bernard Mandeville are real types. Hilda and Marion are well contrasted. Of the two worlds to which we are introduced, Letchmere's and Letty's, the latter is very much the more convincing and very much the more pleasant.

"Letty" is the last of the tragi-comedies that Sir Arthur has, as yet, given us. I believe we should all like another.

We now come to that class of play which I have ventured to call the "sentimental serial". In method, idea, and conception, these plays seem to me to fill upon the stage the place occupied in literature by the ever-popular sentimental serial. In the case of one of them, "Lady Bountiful," I understand that Sir Arthur deliberately set out to write a novel in play form. And whilst it did not succeed very well as a play, it probably would have done so as a novel. Moreover, Sir Arthur might have written it as such. There is a prefatory letter contributed by him to William Archer's "Theatrical Year of 1895," which shows how well he can write prose when he likes.

But by far the most successful of this class of play is the ever-fragrant "Sweet Lavender". I do not suppose a day ever passes upon which this gentle comedy is not played somewhere in the world. And it should be so, for it is quite perfect of its kind, a sugar stick, admirably cooked and served. And nearly everybody likes sweets, at times; except a few *very* serious people who are none the better for their abstinence.

Sir Arthur went straight for sentiment and got it, and, perhaps for that very reason, it is not sickly. It is sincere, and the characterization of the play is human.

Lavender is not, by any means, an angel, nor is Dick Phenyl, although he does sometimes get drunk! Sir Arthur is not one of those sentimental writers who like to make their heroes appear at their best, when they are at their worst. Dick Turpin was probably seen at his best when he was *not* robbing a coach, and, as Sir W. S. Gilbert had pointed out, we should see the coster

when he has finished jumping on his mother if we want to see him at his best. The characters in "Sweet Lavender" are just ordinary human beings and the only angel in the case is the author who sees them and paints them as such. This probably is the secret of the play's perennial success. There must be something *alive* in it to keep it going so long.

"Gibing" comedies are a fairly recent invention on Sir Arthur's part, and one wishes he had never invented them. The first one was "A Wife without a Smile". One feels, reading between the lines, that it is really almost a savage gibe at a public which refused to take to its heart "Iris," a play into which Sir Arthur felt that he had put his very best work. But "Iris" failed on account of its very excellence. The public are scarcely to be blamed for not being too anxious to watch a butcher fatten a lamb and then slay it. Is the skill of the butcher sufficient excuse to justify their standing by to watch? It seems to me that Sir Arthur made the mistake that artists are so prone to make—that art justifies anything and everything. Because a thing is a fine work of art, no matter how hideous, revolting, or disgusting, does that merit alone excuse and justify its existence? The Chinese are remarkable artists in torture and have produced some wonderful works in that direction! But there were other reasons for the comparative failure of "Iris," for it achieved a very fair measure of success. It was the wrong play at the wrong time. A ruthless, relentless tragedy which was produced at a moment when the whole country was writhing under a ruthless, relentless war. How could any one hope to attract with such a thing at such a time? There was a sad lack of common sense somewhere.

Other tilting comedies are "The Thunderbolt" and "The Mind the Paint Girl". In the former Sir Arthur prods away at the dead bodies of the sanctimonious humbugs whom he had already slain in "His House in Order". He is whacking away at dead horses and the great scene falls flat. The situation seems overdrawn, and the characters also. A certain woman has, for the sake of her husband and family, destroyed a will. She is not beloved by her husband's family, who consider she has married beneath her. Her husband takes the burden of the crime on his own shoulders, but eventually the truth comes out, and his relations, who are "the good ones of this earth," bait him unmercifully. But one does not feel that even these cold-hearted fiends could have rubbed it into her husband so maliciously; and one feels that his gallantry and self-abnegation would have silenced them.

"The Mind the Paint Girl" is something of a gibe against the success of musical comedy. We are shown some charming young ladies whose morals are not precisely their strongest point; but it is neither true, fair nor just to insinuate that that is generally the reason for their success in their particular line. I do not mean to say that that is deliberately insinuated in "The Mind the Paint Girl," but it is an insinuation that many folks are only too ready to read into it. No musical comedy actress ever yet succeeded with the public on account of the badness of her character. Her personal beauty, the cleverness of her dancing, singing, or acting won that battle. Beauty is no *distinction* in the average English musical comedy actress. The beauty and daintiness that are to be seen any night of the week at the Gaiety, Daly's, or the Adelphi theatres, are astounding. That part of their business they can nearly all manage; there-

fore when one of them detaches herself from the crowd and begins to dance and sing, one may be sure she can do both. I recollect, on one occasion, seeing a lady who was admittedly drawing a large salary merely on account of her appearance, accommodated with a song. The result was not brilliant, and the applause when she stopped was heartfelt. But it is, or was until very recently, a commoner sight to see an incompetent playing an important part in the "legitimate" than in the "illegitimate" drama.

And as for the extraordinary success of musical comedy; well, it is easier to succeed in that direction, and who would not prefer to see a good comedian to an indifferent tragedian?

But we have finished with the gibes, and let us hope Sir Arthur has. Clever though they were, they will not be missed.

To turn to the more cheery subject of tragedy, the first from Sir Arthur's pen was "The Profligate," produced by John Hare at the Garrick Theatre on 24 April, 1889. It is a straightforward story, simply and forcibly told, with all Sir Arthur's wonderful ability to produce a telling and distressing situation. The plot is quite an old one, but none the worse for that. A young, innocent girl married to a man a few years her senior in point of time, but centuries in experience, especially of the wicked order. Marriage with such a charming girl naturally has a purifying effect upon the man's character, and just as he is coming along very nicely, and likely to make an excellent husband, up comes a ghost from the past, in the person of a young girl whom he had seduced shortly before he fell in love with and married innocence. The revelation to the bride of her husband's perfidy occurs in a capitally contrived and dramatic

scene. Events have so fallen out that the girl has made a confidante of the bride, who has no suspicions that the seducer is her own husband. He took good care to accomplish his purpose under an assumed name. Presently he is seen walking up the garden path with one Lord Dangars, an evil-liver, as famous as he is infamous. The betrayed girl sees the couple, exclaims that "that is the man!" The bride, of course, assumes that she is referring to Lord Dangars, but a moment after the two men enter the room and the inevitable catastrophe follows.

Then comes, of course, a harrowing scene between the young husband and wife, and the play originally ended with the suicide of the profligate. But in production it was deemed advisable that there should be a happy ending, and this was easily managed. The wife was made to enter the room just before the husband had taken the fatal dose, instead of immediately after, as in the original version. In the one version she was in time, in the other too late. The published version is the "too late" one, and the one that Pinero originally intended. As regards their respective merits, they seem to me equally possible, equally convincing, and equally logical. It has been held that the only logically truthful and possible ending is the tragic one; I believe Sir Arthur himself has said it. But if so his work is more convincing than his words, and the ending really depends upon a chance. If the wife enters the room before her husband has taken the poison, it is inconceivable that she would allow him to swallow it. There is no earthly reason, except that it is a tragedy, why this play should end so tragically. There are degrees in tragedy and there is no very imperative or artistic reason why this one should be in the superlative. When a woman

marries a man she takes him for better or for worse, but when she glibly takes that vow, she has generally got a fixed idea into her head that it is for better. She is seldom in a doubtful state of mind, and never certain that it is for the worse! The tragedy of this play really comes in when the woman finds that she has to keep her vow in the less pleasant sense. At least that is the time when she first realized it. It started long before her wedding, as most tragedies do, when she began elevating a mortal into an ideal, a saint.

But the man has his tragedy too. It is that he is unable to face the past, and allows it to hamper his present, and ruin his future, and that his wife, his help-meet, fails him at this supreme moment.

The suicide is, of course, the greatest tragedy because it prevents the real consummation of the marriage, the fulfilment of the contract. Therefore by abolishing the suicide, or preventing it, the tragedy is undoubtedly lightened and lessened. But surely this has nothing to do with the *artistic value* of the play. If the woman's intervention in the nick of time depended upon her character, and was inconsistent with that character, then of course the happy ending would be inartistic and untrue.

Take, for instance, "The Light that Failed". The tragedy of the story is that Maisie never did and never could love Dick. To make her suddenly turn *and love him*, just because he has gone blind, robs the book of its plausibility and the title of its point. It would not be so bad to make her marry him. Many a girl, perhaps most girls, might do that, under the circumstances. Women, girls especially, are prone to martyrdom and self-sacrifice. But to make her *love* him, was, in my opinion, an artistic crime.

I am writing these lines from my recollection of the patched-up ending as it appeared in the magazine in which the story first came out. I understand that that is also the ending of the play, which I have not seen. It may be that in either or both there was no attempt made to alter Maisie's feelings and that she married Dick out of pity. But one can scarcely imagine Maisie doing that; and if she did, well the light did not fail so lamentably after all!

But Sir Arthur's happy ending was not in any way inconsistent with the character of the heroine. In fact she behaved exactly as a girl of her character would have done under the circumstances. The circumstances depended upon chance, the chance as to what moment she would enter the room. That entrance was a thing that the author had a perfectly legitimate right to bring about when and where he chose. By bringing it about a few moments earlier than in the first version he, at John Hare's request, lightened a tragedy. There was surely no very pressing reason why he should not, and there were probably plenty why he should. One prefers the happier ending for the same reason that one would rather see a man wounded than killed. Moreover the age is getting rid of the absurd superstition that such a wound as the profligate's is necessarily fatal.

The subsidiary plot and interest in "The Profligate" bear some traces of Sir Arthur's "serial" manner. There is a Dickensian kind of sentiment in the hopeless love affair of Hugh Murray, the humdrum lawyer and guardian of the heroine.

"The Profligate," though possibly not so successful as some of the other plays, perhaps had a more far-reaching effect than any of them.

It marked the beginning of a new era in English

drama. Though theatrically conventional in many ways it was perhaps the first English play to show unmistakable signs that conservative England was awakening to the fact that the drama is a live force, and the stage a place where the real facts of life may be irresistibly presented and faced. In early and mid-Victorian times the play had been regarded either as an amusement or a species of narcotic, wherewith human nature might dream away the hours, and lull itself into a false sense of security from the effects of its own actions. A happy ending was a most comforting business and it recurred after anything and everything. I myself confess to a preference for the play that begins and ends well. But an impossibly happy ending is pernicious, and it had been for far too long the custom for plays which were openly recognized as impossible, to be secretly looked upon as possible and comforting.

A bad shock was wanted on this treacherously complacent lake, and it got it when Ibsen rose up like a volcano. The waves caused by his outburst spread to English shores and broke in "The Profligate". All honour to the author who was the first to perceive and welcome the incoming tide of realism.

Four years after "The Profligate," Sir Arthur wrote another tragedy, which is generally considered to be his best, though personally I prefer "Iris".

This was "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," produced at the St. James' Theatre, on Saturday, 27 May, 1893.

In some ways it follows closely the lines of "The Profligate," in others leaves them behind. It is unrelieved gloom from the first page to the last. There is absolutely no comic or sentimental relief. There is no room for any. When a man marries such a woman as Paula Tanqueray, there can be no hope for comedy.

By "such a woman" I do not mean what is technically known as a fallen woman. They can sometimes get up again, and they do so more easily as the years go by. But there is nothing of the Magdalen about Paula. She makes no real attempt to get up out of the mud, but merely lies there and squeals and endeavours to drag other people down with her. She is successful with Tanqueray, though we are not shown exactly how she did it. From the way he talks to his friends, we are led to believe he married her out of pity; from the way he talks to her, out of love—passion. In fact he and his marriage are both a little unconvincing, inexplicable, if the attraction is anything more than merely animal. The play has been called the eternal and inevitable tragedy of a woman with a past; but Paula's present has quite as much to do with her trouble as her past. Her temperament precipitates the tragedy, which would have been a very much worse one for all concerned if she had had no past. She would have been a smug, respectable, bickering wife, and the marriage would have been a very long-drawn-out misery, "something lingering, with boiling oil in it". The long and short of it is that Paula is an *impossible* woman. Her pendant in the play, Aubrey Tanqueray's daughter, Ellean, is also rather impossible; conventual and conventional. She may, of course, grow out of it, but when she returns from her trip abroad engaged to Ardale, she has not changed sufficiently to prevent one wondering how that poor man ever managed to confess his faults to her.

The scene where he first comes face to face with Paula, his past mistress and future mother-in-law, is a harrowing situation, in the best Pinerotic manner.

Here we have the long arm again, but it is not too

long. The unexpected often happens, especially when it is the dreaded as well. The characters of the play are still a little stagey, though less so than in former plays. Aubrey Tanqueray is a conventional prig, Ellean a conventual one, Mrs. Cortelyon a convenient one! Cayley Drummle is technically an effective character, but ethically an ineffectual and not altogether uncontemptible one. He is one of those dangerous people who have no enemies, and lounge through life taking a benevolent interest in other people's affairs so long as they do not jeopardize his own comfort. He is not, by any means, a mere stage type; such men exist, and are generally to be found at a comfortable club or wherever there is a good dinner going. To do them justice, they generally have the sense to stop preaching when anyone is really in trouble, and their silent sympathy is sometimes consoling when there is nothing to be *done*, which state of affairs occurs fairly frequently.

The construction of the play is simple in the extreme. There is, as we have seen, no comic or sentimental relief, but the presence on the scenes of Sir George and Lady Orreyd might be mistaken for such. But they are not a relief, they are an intensitive. The dialogue is a little over-polished, stilted, and pedantic, but the fact that the play succeeds in gripping the interest and attention of its audience in spite of these little blemishes speaks volumes in its favour. It is an unquestionably fine drama, one of those that count. At the moment of writing these lines it is being played to crowded and interested houses, in spite of the fact that no attempt has been made to dress it up or doff the somewhat stiff and dowdy dramatic garments of the period in which it was first produced.

The successor to "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" was

"The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," first produced at the Garrick Theatre, under the management of John Hare, in March, 1895. This is the unsatisfactory and lukewarm tragedy of two unsatisfactory and lukewarm characters. "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" earned her notoriety as a would-be ardent socialistic agitator. She afterwards married, and a miserable marriage it turned out to be; then she was left a widow, and in that condition came across one Lucas Cleeve, a neurotic, self-satisfied, sensual egoist, who, unfortunately for himself, possessed sufficient brain-power to hide his deficiencies and get himself generally looked upon as the "coming man," when he was really the going one, and going as fast as he could—to the Devil. It is not difficult to guess that such a man is separated from his wife and consequently a public menace. He falls ill in Rome—just such a place that such a man would choose to fall ill in—and moreover falls into the tender arms of Mrs. Ebbsmith, who nurses him like an angel and thinks he is one. Then he is moved on to Florence and finally fetches up in Venice, where he recovers and is discovered at the opening of the play living in an atmosphere of the noblest ideal and endeavour with his erstwhile nurse. He and she have become essential to one another, or, to be exact, they are both under the impression that *she* has become essential to *him* in his work. His hopes of a great parliamentary career are blighted, so he is going to write books instead, and she, woman-like, is quite blissfully content to be his inspiration. But she has begun to have vague doubts of him, and, worse still, doubts of herself.

Rome, Florence, and Venice do not exactly lead to the Platonic ideal. Passion plays too great a part in their friendship, and the woman says so, fairly bluntly.

Meanwhile Lucas Cleeve's friends at home have begun to move and hope to end by patching up some sort of reconciliation between him and his wife. They send as an emissary a typical Pinerotic character, the Duke of St. Olpherts, a practical old roué and man of the world. Agnes, Mrs. Ebbsmith, determined to make herself mistress of the situation, interviews him. As a result of the interview, they each gain some advantage. The Duke paints Lucas so truthfully that Agnes can but believe the portrait. On the other hand she sees how she can win him and keep him at her side and also disarm the Duke. Lucas has ordered a beautiful gown for Agnes, which she has hitherto refused to wear. She now dons it and with its aid and that of her natural beauty wins the day, or rather the hour, and draws Lucas back to her from the opposition. She is more to him than all the world, even than himself and his career. But it is only for an hour, her hour. Lucas soon relapses back into his own and his old self, and wishing to have his cake and eat it at the same time, proposes to agree to a pleasant solution put forward by the Duke. He and his wife will have an outward reconciliation, brought about for the sake of the world and his career; but will find his real life and happiness in a pretty little suburban home, with a couple of discreet servants and Agnes! That finishes it. Agnes's hour is past. They each go their own way. Lucas to an entirely mythical home life, which is to bolster up an equally problematical career; Agnes to brood and think, and perhaps learn to pray, upon the Yorkshire moors at the home of a kind clergyman and his still kinder sister.

The tragedy of the play is the old one of two people imagining that they are on a higher plane than the rest of human nature and finding themselves on an equal or

perhaps even lower one, for they have deceived themselves. But the woman's tragedy is the sadder. The man is a vain, indulgent sensualist who barely deceives himself; the woman is self-deceived; a distinction with a very great difference. She never was quite what she thought she was, and what she thought she wanted to be. There is a scene in the play in which she throws a Bible into the fire and then snatches it out again at the cost of a burnt hand. As the play is purely a psychological one, a study in characters and temperaments, unlike "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," which is chiefly concerned with one temperament and its effect upon the situation, this scene seems a little strained, dragged in for effect. But it is not entirely inconsistent, and there is something very significant in Agnes's snatching the Bible back again. That is she all over. Her socialism, atheism, and paganism have never been quite the genuine article. She herself says that her childhood and early maidenhood were as devout and pious as those of any average young girl.

Her tragedy is that she is hopelessly (or hopefully!) commonplace. And few can draw a commonplace character and its tragedy better than Sir Arthur Pinero. He does this again in the latest grim tragedy that he has given us, "Mid-channel". Poor Zoe Blundell and her husband are hopelessly commonplace, indeed almost common without the place, and their petty bickerings and squabbles are uninteresting. Zoe is the better of the two. As she herself says before her suicide at the end of the play, there is a lot of good in her, but she never really gives it a chance. She seems absolutely paralysed by her pig of a husband; and her utter impatience with him and refusal to understand his pettifogging nature bring about her downfall. Poor Zoe, it certainly

would have been dust and ashes to have had to try to love, and make allowances for, that thing, but it was the only thing that could have saved her. And it was no more use trying to do it, as she did, by means of some big thing. Pig-headed, stubborn little natures like his cannot be taken by storm, but require a long, desperately wearisome and nauseating siege before they capitulate. He was a cad, and Zoe was not at all the right person to have married a cad. Here again temperament was the real cause of the tragedy, as it is of nearly all tragedies. Childlessness was hinted at in the play as the real cause, but childishness would have been nearer the truth. Or, at least, nothing less than the distractions of a dozen children could have averted this catastrophe. Like "Iris," the play was beautifully written and worked out, but failed to attract on account of its very excellence. Art by itself is not sufficiently satisfying except to a very few, and those few are generally artists themselves. It must express something that is at least interesting in itself, if it is to attract. There is little that is interesting in the quarrels and fate of such a couple as Zoe Blundell and her husband. To expect a play upon the subject to succeed merely on account of clever workmanship is surely a species of professional vanity. One would sooner hear a painter say, "See what a beautiful picture I have put before your eyes" than "See how well I paint".

But we are getting ahead too quickly. "Mid-channel" was preceded by a few years by what is perhaps Sir Arthur's best tragedy, to which I have already referred on more than one occasion. "Iris" never achieved the success of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," principally on account of the objections already mentioned, and the fact that there was no Mrs. Patrick Campbell to thrill all London in the name part.

"Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and poor Iris Bellamy most certainly was. There could never be any hope for such a supine, luxury-loving creature in this world. But the way in which ruthless, relentless fate hunts her down in the person of the unspeakable Maldonado is too horrible. She had no more chance of escaping from his clutches than a young rabbit has from a stoat, once it has been marked down. If her boy lover had been only half a man he might have seen this and rescued her in the beginning, or if he had returned from British Columbia any more of one he might have saved her in the end.

Cutting down trees and leading the healthy outdoor life might at least have taught him to knock Maldonado down if not to pick Iris up; but he did neither. When he heard her trouble he just left the room, wounded to the quick. No doubt he thought his heart was broken, but it was not even formed. His idol was shattered, that was all. The plaster-cast saint which he had set up in the place of a weak, gentle lady. He went away and left her, defenceless, on the brink of a precipice, to return and find her crushed and bleeding at the foot of it—and then—leave her again. And so Iris is turned out into the streets, and one wonders what happened to her after that. I have an idea that Croker Harrington came to her rescue and at last got some sort of reward for his long and futile faithfulness.

And Maldonado smashed up the furniture!

I have been told, on very good authority, that Sir Arthur's original idea was for Maldonado to murder Iris, and then give himself up to the police. An Othello-like ending which would have been immensely effective! But one wonders whether the cool and calculating "Maldo," who laid his plans and gained his ends with

such diabolical cleverness, would have ever lost himself sufficiently to do that. There is something very convincing in the calm way he analyses the final situation, and coolly informs Iris that it is women such as she who send men like him to the gallows. But he will not even do that much for her. Poor Iris! She is indeed brought low. But all the same Maldonado was in love with her desperately and hopelessly, until the very end, and so—one wonders!

The character drawing in "Iris" seems to me to show an advance upon "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray". It is more even. The principals are, of course, very well drawn, and there are fewer stage types amongst the subordinate characters.

The usual Pinerotic satellite, Croker Harrington, is an old friend with a newer and better face. The final scene between him and Iris is, surely, admirable. There is nothing especial about Fanny Silvain, or Aurea, or the Wynnings, or Arthur Kane. There is nothing to lead the audience to suspect that the latter is going to turn out a defaulting solicitor, which is good.

The dialogue is polished, and as usual too pedantic; but it is not so overdone as it sometimes is in Sir Arthur's plays, when the talk is really overcharged with drama and point.

The construction of the play is swift and sure. The arm of coincidence is not quite so long as it was in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray". But the second act is a little like the proverbial Act II of a pantomime, where all the characters generally find themselves on the same spot.

When Iris goes to Cadenabbia, with Lawrence Trenwith in tow, for a little peaceful and quiet love-making, if there is such a thing, she soon finds herself surrounded by practically all her friends of the first act, and with Mal-

donado looming in the background. However do they all get there? They must all have lots of money and little to do. Or does Iris belong to the set which goes to the Italian lakes at that time of the year? Sir Arthur likes characters in "sets". Birds of a feather . . . is his motto. The very opposite of Bernard Shaw, whose object in life is to flutter the dovecots and mix people up. The crux of the play really comes at the close of the third act, surely the right place in a five-act play, when Iris first makes use of Maldonado's cheque-book—to help somebody else, of course. This is a capital touch. The author is evidently well acquainted with the first principles of temptation—as an artist, I mean! From the moment of Lawrence's departure we, of course, see all this coming. Indeed one sees it far sooner than that, but inevitability does not weaken any tragedy, or any situation either, for the matter of that.

A grimly satirical author might have finished the play with the close of the third act and it would have lacked nothing as a complete work of art, but Sir Arthur prefers to complete the tragedy, which he does with relentless fidelity. But it is a long story and so all of the classical unities cannot be strictly observed. It will be a bad day for the drama when they *always* are, and an equally bad one when they *never* are.

So "Iris" is, in its way, a sort of serial tragedy, and would make an excellent serial story, though I do not think it would be of much value as an object-lesson. Poor Iris is the kind of heroine that many girls envy. Her life is not all tragedy, by any means.

Of course all of Sir Arthur's plays cannot be classed under the headings I have mentioned. Of those outside of these groups the best are "The Gay Lord Quex," "Trelawny of the Wells," and "The Princess and the

Butterfly". The first of these is, as I have said, a theatrical *tour de force*, a fine stage play, giving a splendid opportunity to an actress, which Irene Vanbrugh made the most of, and a fine one to an actor. I think the end is a pity. It is cynical, unnecessarily sordid, and untrue generally speaking. One is not quite sure whether it is the author who is under the painful illusion that *all* men are like Quex, and girls know it and shy at the old roué whilst welcoming the young one, or whether this is merely Lord Quex's opinion. If the latter it is a good and very characteristic touch. Roués, old and young, invariably bolster themselves up by thinking that every one else is like themselves. But is there any reason why Quex should be right in this instance, except perhaps the dramatist's horror of a conventional situation? Moreover his method, in this instance, of proving his point is clumsy and not altogether convincing. When a pretty girl deliberately asks a man for a kiss, he runs the risk of appearing priggish if he refuses, and many a brave and good man has not the courage to do that! Again, I confess to a preference for the happy ending when it can be logical and legitimate, as it certainly could in this case.

"Trelawny of the Wells" did not, I believe, achieve the popular success on its first production that it did upon its recent revival. The explanation perhaps lies in the fact that people are broader-minded than they used to be. The private life of an actor is no longer a mystery, and is in some ways none the worse for that. The incursions of the stage into general society and of society to the stage have increased the public stock of interest in and knowledge of the profession. "Trelawny of the Wells" is not so incomprehensible to the lay mind as it was on its first production. I once heard some one say

to an actor: "It is difficult to believe that you are an actor because you are so much like other people"! The unfortunate Thespian was not quite certain whether this was a compliment or the reverse.

At first this "taking up" of the stage by the public had a bad effect upon the art and actors in general, because it was overdone, and society went to the other extreme, and, after having ignored actors, began to worship them personally, the very worst possible thing for an artist of any description. Now the stage is becoming like any other profession. Its successful men are rewarded as successful men in other professions are, and the mere thought of an actor is not much more exciting than that of a plumber.

A time will come when this healthy humanizing interest will spread to schoolmasters, and eventually, perhaps, to parsons.

A parson at the present time is regarded by the average person as a sort of holy being; some day he will be looked upon as a human one.

Certain members of the theatrical profession, instead of grasping the full significance of all this and accepting the compliment involved, took umbrage at Sir Arthur's theatrical types, saying that he had libelled the actor of those days. But the world will prefer to accept the judgment of Sir Arthur's proven powers of observation. The average actor is not accustomed to look at things as a whole, but is much more likely to look at them as a part! Sir Arthur has drawn largely upon his own experience, and a man of his talents is quite capable of reasoning backwards correctly for a few years. His reason is very much more convincing than another man's remembrance. One has only got to read a little between the lines of the lives, journals, or reminiscences

of the actors of those days to see how near the truth he gets.

Actors as a whole were probably no better and no worse than other people, but they were *different*, and are so still, to a certain extent. This is because they have been treated differently. Nowadays the profession is open to all classes. It scarcely was so in those days. To be more precise, all classes are now open to the profession, and fall in with the actor, where they used to fall out with him. "Trelawney of the Wells" is a charming, interesting comedy, the end is a little weak, but it is difficult to see how it can be improved upon.

"The Princess and the Butterfly" is a very clever comedy and is, perhaps, the only one that Sir Arthur has written which reads very much better than it plays. The plot is a distinctly good one. A middle-aged couple who do not love each other get to the verge of matrimony in the effort to prevent themselves from marrying some one whom they do love. The said some one, in each case, being young enough to make their elders appear ridiculous! Of course the inevitable happens, and the elders are mercifully preserved from each other, though the unfortunate young objects of their affection are not so mercifully preserved from them! The play is clever and witty, but whilst it is possible to understand the affection of Sir George Lamorant for the young and fascinating Fay Zuliani, the Princess Pannonia's love for the appalling Edward Oriel, who ought to be Edward Balliol, is incomprehensible. But such things sometimes are. A great many characters flit across the stage and contribute to the comedy. Their entrances and their exits are very cleverly managed indeed. They do not get into each other's way at all, or interfere with the play. They

are not exactly necessary, but are distinctly accessory. Nothing that Sir Arthur has yet done shows his power of moving and manipulating characters to greater advantage. On the whole, "The Princess and the Butterfly" is as conscientious, careful and clever a bit of comedy —it is real comedy—as Sir Arthur has yet given us.

Another admirable comedy is "His House in Order," a play which I believe holds the record for length of run upon its first representation in London. It, too, is a real comedy, a little long-winded in parts, but never uninteresting. It is less intense and not so much of a single character study as some of Sir Arthur's other plays. In writing it he seems to have struck a new, and what one had hoped at the time would be a very fruitful vein, but that has not so far been the case. The theme, the battle of a second wife against the memory of her predecessor, is not altogether new, very few good themes are, but it is very well treated from a new standpoint. Nina Jesson is a delightful character, and it is difficult to understand how she could ever have fallen in love with such a prig as Filmer. But he has not always been a prig. We are told that he made love to Nina, his son's governess, whilst his first wife was still alive. He says that he has never forgiven himself for that moment of weakness, and there we have the whole thing in a nutshell. His excessive priggishness at the opening of this play is the reaction from his old lapse. His principles are not really principles at all, but simply self-love. He cannot abide the idea of himself not being strong or perfect or all the rest of it! The sooner and the more often that sort of man falls the better for him and everybody else. Filmer's own notion of what he himself ought to be, and his own and her family's notion of

what his first wife was, make a most admirable couple. One hears of the first wife's fall with the greatest relief. Even Nina must have eventually softened to her after that.

The first wife's family, the Ridgeleys, quite a new departure for the author, are a home-made product of which England has no need to be proud. Every soil, however good, has its own weeds, and the Ridgeleys are indigenous to England. Indeed in Norway and some other countries where "His House in Order" was played the audiences refused to accept the Ridgeleys as possibilities. In Germany they seem unfortunate enough to possess something like them. Magda's parents in "Heimat" resemble them. But there is a difference in the latter's favour. Colonel Schwartz is a narrow-minded, fanatical bigot, Sir Daniel Ridgeley a pestilential, hypocritical, self-righteous prig. Geraldine Ridgeley, with her extraordinary capacity for minding other people's business, resembles the aunt in "Heimat".

The Ridgeleys are extreme types, but they are not impossible or overdrawn. In a play that followed, "The Thunderbolt," Sir Arthur went one better, and I think one worse. He overdid the Ridgeley element and his play fell to the ground. In "His House in Order" we see just as much of them as we can stand; in "The Thunderbolt," more.

As I have said, "His House in Order" is the latest great play that Sir Arthur has given us, and we are hungry for more. Can he not follow up the vein that he struck upon that occasion and give us more plays in which there is as much for the human affections to rest upon? That play was interesting and popular

because of Nina's fight and victory. Victories are generally more interesting than defeats.

Nina cries out for children of her own. Why not let her have some? Every one will be only too glad to make their acquaintance. Nina holds a very high place in Sir Arthur's long gallery of wonderfully convincing feminine portraits. Paula Tanqueray, Theophila Fraser, Iris Bellamy, Letty Shell, Fay Zuliani, Sophie Fulgarney, Nina Jesson, and Zoe Blundell are an intensely interesting group, of which any author might be proud. Of Theophila Fraser, Letty Shell, Sophie Fulgarney and Nina Jesson their sex might also be proud. The most tenderly drawn and to my sense gently lovable is Letty, though Fay Zuliani runs her very close.

For nearly forty years Sir Arthur Pinero has held a most commanding position in English dramatic literature. For a great many years of that time he was, so to speak, our only general. He learnt his trade as a dramatist in the theatre, hence his outlook is a little theatrical but is, perhaps, none the less true for that. His language is, at times, pedantic and stilted; but his characters live, in spite of that fault, which seldom, if ever, has much appreciable effect on the scene. One often does not notice the little failing until the play is over. Many of his characters are well-worn theatrical types, but if they are they have also worn well, which means that there is something right with the material.

As a playwright, Sir Arthur has occupied the difficult but important position of a bridge between the old order and the new. To some extent he has sat on the fence. Some one has to sit there, and it must be a very clear-headed person who can survey the ground on both sides, and warn those on one side to look out for what

is coming, and those on the other to look where they are going. And Sir Arthur was the first, with "The Profligate," to get down and open the gate to the new order. And having done this duty as a scout, there is no reason why he should not fight well in the van of the new army. His weapons have by no means lost their fighting value; his humour, his keen insight, his extraordinary ability to present a telling situation, and wonderful knowledge of the feminine mind. There is only one thing wanting, and that is by no means lacking in "His House in Order" and many previous plays. I mean the human heart. In one or two of his later plays there is, as I have already pointed out, a lack of sympathy, something wanting for the human affections to rest upon. There also seems to be a vein of anxiety in the later work. Sir Arthur once stated to an interviewer that he lived in daily dread of hearing himself referred to as "that veteran dramatist," but a man of his immense abilities and command of his business need fear nothing. What if his well has run dry? He can always bore another one, and do it in half the time, with three times the effect of most other people. It only means a change in the point of view. Somebody whose English was more expressive than grammatical once remarked that it was better to be a "has-been" than a "never-wasser," but perhaps it is best of all to be an "always-isser".

The present writer once heard Sir Arthur modestly describe himself as an "ordinary dramatist," and in a sense that is a good description. But he is no ordinary "ordinary dramatist". Were he never to write another line an honourable and historical position in the history of the drama is assured him. He is an ordinary dra-

matist only in the sense of the word that it is his business. He is a product of the theatre, who has reached the very top of the tree by the ordinary routes, as others have done before and will do again. William Shakespeare was one of them. He, too, in the Pinerotic sense, was an ordinary dramatist.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW.

If Sir Arthur Pinero is an ordinary dramatist, George Bernard Shaw is certainly an extraordinary one—in every sense of the word. He began life as an Irishman in Dublin. He would be a bold man who would prophecy as to where, and as what, he will end it. We will only concern ourselves with him as a dramatist, and as such he certainly causes one deep concern, for, as Quinn remarked of David Garrick, if he is all right we are all wrong. Personally, I have a comfortable feeling that if we were right, we were not *all* right, and that there are more things in heaven and in earth than were ever dreamt of in our drama until Mr. Shaw came on the scenes.

Mr. Shaw's life previous to his becoming a dramatist only interests us for the present in the bearing it had upon his becoming one—as his training ground. He began life, according to his own account, as a very hard worker, thinker, and sponger. Then he became an agitator, a social reformer, an art, musical and dramatic critic and finally a dramatist.

It is a very great compliment to the drama that he should have arrived at it as a worthy means of expression, after so many years of sincere drudgery. Mr. Shaw likes to speak of play-writing as a habit that he has got into and finds it difficult to get out of; but he respects it, and never alludes to it, unless I am very much mistaken, as a bad habit. He would not be be-

lieved if he did. Good habits lead to better ones, and Mr. Shaw began well. With Sir Arthur Pinero play-writing is a profession, with Mr. Shaw it is, in a sense, a pastime. At the same time they are both great artists who, no doubt, find their profession their pastime and their pastime their profession. About the same moment that Pinero first made up his mind to become a dramatist, Shaw probably meditated becoming a nuisance, and a nuisance he has remained ever since, just as one's conscience is a nuisance, or the principle of mathematics if one's balance is on the wrong side. Shaw is an agitator in every sense of the word; a paid agitator who enjoys the significant distinction of being the most highly paid by those whom he agitates most uncomfortably.

The worrying began, dramatically speaking, with some most unsettling criticisms, written mainly for "The Saturday Review". One read them with fear and trembling if one had enjoyed the plays they criticised, with doubt and distress if one had not. But—one read them! We have been told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and some of us feel that we must read our Shaw in fear and trembling.

By commencing with criticism Mr. Shaw started life, painful as the thought may be to him, in much the same way as other people, but he became exceptional when he became a doer of the word himself. He tells us the history, in the first volume of his plays, of how "Widower's Houses" came to be written, and not produced. The account of this proceeding, and indeed the whole history of Bernard Shaw as a dramatic phenomenon, will some day make a stimulating chapter in the history of English drama, but I shall not attempt to do more than touch upon it now. In the first place, even if I had both the space and time at my disposal, I doubt if I should have

the ability. In the second it has not yet fallen into the perspective of history—we are still in the movement; and in the last place Mr. Shaw has himself done it very thoroughly in the various introductions and explanations prefaced to, and interspersed throughout, the published volumes of his plays. As they have had to be produced when and where they could be and not always in chronological order, I propose to take them in the order in which they are published.

The first volume contains three plays labelled "unpleasant". One wonders if, when publishing it, Mr. Shaw had in his mind that human beings if they are really seriously ill generally have more faith in the nasty medicines than in the nice ones? I think that, as a rule, folk are in a better state of health when they have finished with reading Shaw than when they began, though they may not feel quite so comfortable and complacent. "Unpleasant plays" contained three plays, "Widower's Houses," "The Philanderers," and "Mrs. Warren's Profession". In his inevitable preface Mr. Shaw explains why they are unpleasant: "because their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts".

"Widower's Houses" at the best shows one that ugly things out of sight are usually out of mind, and that it is probably more by good luck than good management if one is not engaged in robbing the widow and the orphan, oneself. At the worst, it may show that one is doing that, but did not know it before because it was too much trouble to find out. But quite apart from the lesson it drives home, "Widower's Houses" is a very good play, and good in an extremely simple and orthodox way. The plot is quite simple and straightforward, and can be stated as all plots should be in a very few words.

A young man falls in love with a young lady. The young lady's income is drawn from what the young man considers to be an unworthy source. She has to choose between giving up the money or giving up him. She wisely and naturally chooses the latter. He then discovers what he never knew before, namely that his money comes, indirectly, from the same polluted source as hers does. Feeling now upon equal terms, he desires to patch up the engagement, but her pride has been wounded and she will have nothing more to say to him. They separate. Time passes. They both fret and are eventually brought together again by their common interest, the very thing that kept them apart in the first instance.

It will be at once seen that this plot is conventionally correct, and fulfils all the conditions and obeys all the canons that the most strictly classical critic could desire. It has a beginning, a middle and an end, and moveover the end of it forms quite a good beginning to another story! It contains the seeds of its own development and resolves within itself. Its wriggles are brought about, so to speak, by muscles and sinews within itself. It is alive, not a mere puppet dangled at the end of a string, like some plays are. But this is not all. Mr. Shaw has not only hampered himself with all these conventional demands, but he has made his characters every-day people in every-day circumstances. The only real exception is the heroine, who has quite an exceptionally violent temper, which will provide dramas by the dozen for her future husband and family. Lickcheese is the *deus ex machinâ* of the play—the man who has his eyes open to facts as they are, and makes use of them accordingly. Mr. Sartorius, Messrs. Cokane and Trench, are all every-day types. It is an

ordinary play, written round ordinary people in an ordinary situation. And this proclaims Mr. Shaw the artist that he is. The play is obviously written with an object. It shows up a certain evil, at the same time it also shows that the evil is, at present, a necessary one, or at any rate that it is the least of a choice of evils, the best of a bad job. But it does not do this by any meretricious or adventitious aids, or by the assistance of what is called dramatic contrast. On the stage Mr. Shaw is a playwright first and a preacher afterwards, not a preacher first and a playwright a long way afterwards!

Let us compare "Widower's Houses" with "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," which was avowedly a play with a purpose, but with very little else. A semi-supernatural being comes from Heaven into a boarding house situated in Hell, which he promptly converts into a heaven in double-quick time. But reformers are not generally treated so generously as that, and in real life if the stranger produced any harmony at all, it would be that of the inhabitants agreeing amongst themselves to turn him out. Out he would go, and one or possibly two of the lodgers might break away and follow him. Eventually he might draw them all after him, but not all at once. There is nothing really dramatic in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back". There is something temporarily elevating perhaps, which makes us hope that some such person may come along and pull us out of the mud, and then lets us down badly when no such thing happens. But "Widower's Houses" wakes one up, makes one feel a bit of a worm doubtless, a healthy state of mind which shows one where charity begins. At the same time it is a satisfactory play and work of art; a good play as well as a good object-lesson. Any-

one who has got a sermon to preach has a perfect right to preach it in play-form if he can, but if he cannot he has no legal or artistic right to hide his inabilities behind his intentions. Mr. Shaw has, at least, mastered his medium, and does not lure us to the theatre under false pretences. He calls "Widower's Houses" a play, and it is one.

The next unpleasant play in the book is "The Philanderers," which is described as a comedy, and certainly is one, but a comedy is a very much more elastic term than a play, and Mr. Shaw might with advantage have qualified his description and called it a "Satanic Comedy"! Although it is very clever in its way, and complete and finished, it does not seem to me such a good play as "Widower's Houses". It is less simple, less straightforward, less powerful and less dramatic. There is no such moment in it as that in "Widower's Houses" where Trench's eyes are open to his own position. The only scene that seems to me to touch a really live wire is a subsidiary one where a certain character discovers that he has not got an interesting liver complaint after all. In fact the complaint does not exist, and never did! He is no longer unique! Nor is the doctor who discovered, or rather invented the disease! As a whole "The Philanderers" in spite of its wit and brilliancy, is uninteresting, almost boring. As boring and unsatisfying as philandering is. Of course it impresses upon us the unpleasant truth that we are all tarred with the same brush, but we are all more or less conscious of that fact. "The Philanderers" does not produce an awakening, or a sense of drama! But the third of the little unpleasant series, "Mrs. Warren's Profession," does so with a vengeance. As I see it the plot may be stated in a very few words. A certain young

lady is going to do great things in and for this world, and has begun well. She is eminently fitted for the task in every way, but has yet to learn where she herself stands, so something happens to show her, very plainly. Then she is ready to begin work on something and some one else.

Something or somebody is always turned inside out in a good play, and in this case it is the young lady. Her mother, it appears, has provided her with the necessary funds for her education and comforts for her life with the proceeds of a questionable profession. She keeps "private hotels" in various continental cities where her clients' visits are more frequent than prolonged. When this revelation is first made to the girl her feelings may better be imagined than described. She regards her mother as an unclean thing simply because she happens to be in an unclean position. Then the mother tells her story, and the daughter discovers that the mother's position, poor though it is, is very much better than the one into which she has been born. And all this time the girl has been living on the mother's money and never thinking of where it comes from.

The interview is beautifully written, and quite worthy to be mentioned in the same breath as that other great interview between Hamlet and his mother; which, by the way, is not usually regarded as revolting, and yet there is very little to choose between the two in that respect. Revulsion is largely a question of perspective. Nobody knows that better than Mr. Shaw, so he refuses to be revolted by anything, and cleans out Augean stables more effectively perhaps than any one realizes at present. All this has a very good effect upon the girl. Her ambition, broadly speaking, has been to help the world out of the mud. But she cannot do that

whilst her own foothold is insecure; whilst she herself is deeper in the mud than she knows. She finds out her own depth, gets a firmer footing herself and is better fitted to help others. Moreover she has now a kinder, more truly compassionate and deeper feeling towards her mother than ever she had before she knew the secret. She does not repudiate her, but repudiates her income; and fortunately for herself has another and cleaner source to which to turn at once. This is not simply a comforting piece of planning on the author's part, but is the direct result of the girl's independent character. She had decided to make a place of her own long before she knew how imperatively necessary it would be for her to do so, so she was able to jump out of the frying-pan and escape the fire.

She has to come right out and be separate. Under the circumstances this may not appear difficult, but there are complications. She has a lover. Owing to her mother's upbringing and education, it is hinted that he is, at least, her half-brother. They are really devoted to each other, and the discovery of the consanguinity does not lead, as it might in a less conscientious play, to their living happily ever after as brother and sister. They do not love each other like that, and they know it, and so they renounce each other quietly and without any sort of fuss, as is usually the case with genuine renunciations. Their little love scenes together, before the fatal discovery is made, are delightful and delicious, and beautifully touched in. The play has many intensely moving, dramatic and touching scenes. There is one moment in the play when the girl's lover is just about to shoot, calmly and unimpassionedly, a man who has insulted her, but the girl turns the muzzle of his rifle against her own breast, and equally calmly and

seriously begs her lover to shoot her. And he would be capable of doing so if it were really necessary for her happiness.

Such scenes as this continually flash upon one in Bernard Shaw's plays. They are never engineered, laboured or melodramatic.

The characters in "Mrs. Warren's Profession" are wonderfully well drawn. Especially Mrs. Warren, who is, as the author describes her, a disreputable old blackguard of a woman, but all the same she is alive and intensely interesting. But disreputable folk sometimes make better parents than the most respectable, when they make up their minds to it. They know their faults so well that they can keep them in the background. Both Frank and Vivian, the hero and heroine of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," are instances of their "parents'" success in this respect. Mrs. Warren's men friends are of the kind one might expect; at the same time they are the pick of her basket. Some may regard it as questionable taste on the author's part to have made the father of Frank a clergyman, but nature is no respecter of persons or parsons, and the author of such a play as "Mrs. Warren's Profession" is scarcely the man to pander to superstition. A clergyman is human like any other man, subject to the same temptations as other men. It is no easier for him to resist them, no more creditable to him if he does, and not really more culpable if he does not. It may have been bad taste which drew the Rev. Samuel Gardiner; but it may also have been human understanding and sympathy.

"Mrs. Warren's Profession" is a decidedly unpleasant play; a very large helping of humble pie in fact, but it is a great play and will live to be appreciated, understood and perhaps even blessed.

Technically speaking, it appears to me to obey and fulfil in quite a startling way, not only the oldest but also the newest and latest refinements in the art of dramatic writing.

Aristotle would have no fault to find with it, and find some surprising virtues. It is a complete, consistent, and dramatic whole, which silences criticism as effectually as it provokes discussion.

Having been duly humbled and brought to our marrow bones by reading the unpleasant plays, we are now in a fit state to read the pleasant ones, without any fear of getting our heads turned by their pleasantries!

The first of them is "Arms and the Man"—a comedy, first produced at the Avenue Theatre in April, 1894.

Its first production in London, to whose shame be it spoken, was not a very great success, but all the same it was extremely well noticed in many of the papers. People did not understand Mr. Shaw then like they do now, and were very much bewildered and not a little scandalized by the chocolate-cream soldier and his extremely practical views upon wars, soldiering and heroism generally. Some people took offence at it and regarded it as an insult to the army, to which it is, in reality, a very great compliment.

After seeing it one is quite ready to believe that the average soldier is remarkable for common sense as well as bravery, whilst the average hero is solely remarkable for bravery. "Arms and the Man" may be rather a come-down for heroes, but it is a "leg-up" for soldiers in general.

The story of this real comedy is delightful. A certain soldier, pursued by the enemy, finds refuge in a young lady's bedroom.

The young lady is betrothed to a certain very gallant

officer, against whom the fugitive soldier has been fighting.

A conversation takes place between the soldier and the lady in which the name of her lover crops up and a very strong contrast is drawn between his somewhat foolhardy bravery and the apparent common-sense cowardice of the fugitive soldier, called by the young lady the Chocolate-Cream Soldier, on account of his little habit of filling his cartridge-cases, etc., with chocolate creams in the place of more—or less—deadly ammunition! At first the girl, accustomed to the ideal of her heroic lover, thoroughly despises the Chocolate-Cream Soldier, but then something happens which upsets all her calculations. A party of soldiers arrive on the scene and search the room for the fugitive, who is hidden by the girl and successfully evades the not very acute vigilance of the searchers.

But certain incidents connected with the search are quite sufficient to show the young lady of what sort of stuff the Chocolate Soldier is made, and her pinchbeck hero Sergius is rapidly fading away before this genuine and surprising article. The soldiers have now gone, it is getting late at night, and the young lady's reputation has to be considered. With the fugitive's permission, she goes and calls her mother to act as chaperon. Whilst she is gone the fugitive creeps into her bed and falls fast asleep; he has been for forty-eight hours without any. When the mother and daughter return they find it quite impossible to wake him, so they do the next best thing and watch over him, and the first act closes on this original situation.

The next act takes place a few months later. Peace has been signed, and the young lady's father and heroic lover have returned from the wars. Both the young

lady and the young man do their best to live up to their somewhat exacting ideal when they are together, but relax a little when they are apart, he by flirting with her pretty maid, and she by thinking of her Chocolate Soldier.

Presently the latter appears upon the scene. He has come to bring back an old coat, which Raina, the young lady, and her mother had lent him on his departure after the bedroom episode. This old coat belonged to the father of Raina. The story of the soldier hiding in Raina's bedroom has become a camp anecdote, and has reached the ears of Raina's father and heroic lover, but of course no names have been mentioned and they have never connected it with Raina and her mother. Consequently the presence of the soldier on the scene makes things very awkward. Moreover he is known to be a very clever man, the war is over, and as he is a professional soldier and mercenary, his services are at the disposal of whoever requires them. As there is still a lot of settling up to be done after the war, the father insists upon his stopping in the house, and assisting with it. His assistance usually consists in doing everything, whilst the father and hero sign his orders.

The upshot of the story may easily be guessed. Raina falls more and more in love with her Chocolate Soldier, and more and more out of it with her hero; and her hero falls more and more in love with the maid, and at last does a really brave action in proposing to marry her. Then Raina falls into the arms of her Chocolate Soldier, who is now well able to support her, as his father, a Swiss hotel-keeper, has died and left him about twenty hotels and a thousand or two of everything.

This is the outline of the story of the play, which very

obviously offers plenty of opportunities for comedy, wit and common sense. The character of the Chocolate Soldier himself, the real hero of the play, is capitally drawn, and the author drives home the point of his comedy with his usual thoroughness. Discretion is the better part of valour, and a live coward is more use than a dead hero in any army!

Cunningly contrived and dramatic little scenes cut the ground from beneath the so-called glory of war. The little Chocolate Soldier is a mercenary, fighting is his business, and he knows that one does not attack an enemy until one can do so with the slightest possible damage to oneself, and the greatest to the other fellow. He comes to loggerheads with the hero, as might have been expected, and is challenged to a duel. He has the choice of weapons, so, being an artillery man, he chooses a machine gun, which his opponent who fights for glory, his own glory, does not consider fair!

The romance of war never got a worse blow than it received from this delightful comedy. When armies are composed of as sensible, practical and clear-headed soldiers as the chocolate one, it will be a poor look-out for their enemies. But quite apart from the object of the play, and whether one approves or disapproves of the author's views, no fault can be found with the comedy, as such, by the most fastidious. It is the very essence of real comedy, tinged, as good comedy nearly always is, with good-natured banter. It is faultlessly constructed. There are no stageyisms, though plenty of Shavianisms, but the author deals very honestly by his audience and never once takes a mean advantage of them, as authors sometimes do. As a play there is little in it to cavil at. One or two little things are im-

probable, but nothing is impossible. For instance, it is almost incredible that a company of soldiers searching a room for a fugitive could miss seeing his revolver staring them in the face from a couch. But the soldiers on this occasion were exhausted after forty-eight hours' hard fighting, and moreover were searching for a man, so a very cursory glance at the couch in the semi-darkness of the room is quite enough to show them he is not there, without revealing what is!

Of course the play has been very much criticized and condemned as an exposition of ideas upon heroism, war, the army, and so on. With that we are not concerned, except in so far as the effect it has upon its audience. An author's business is to interest his audience and keep their attention. I have seen many folk *annoyed* at "Arms and the Man," but none bored, though some of them said they were, afterwards!

In fact I do not ever remember to have seen a really bored audience at a Shaw play, though I have often read in the papers next day that they were!

"Arms and the Man" is followed in the book of pleasant plays by "Candida," or as it might be called "The Poet and the Parson". This is another of the author's plays that will, I believe, live. It is called "a mystery," and it is a mystery, yet there is nothing really mystic about it. "Candida" is the wife of a parson, a most admirable person, who lives, looks and acts the part to the manner born. Whenever he preaches his church is packed to suffocation. His parishioners all adore him, and so does his lady typist, familiarly known as "Prossy". He adores and loves his wife in quite the orthodox and correct manner, that is to say he comes home after a hard day's work and sits back in an easy

chair, whilst she administers to his creature comforts. Her feelings towards him are enigmatical, but she certainly makes him an excellent wife. A stray poet, one Eugene Marjoribanks, finds his way to their home, and is taken in and cared for. He shows his gratitude by falling in love with Candida, and his honesty by telling her husband so. Then the husband metaphorically and physically flies at his throat.

"But," says the poet, in effect, "do you not love her yourself?" "Yes," says the parson, "but I have the right to." "Could you help it?" says the poet. "No," says the parson. "No more can I," says the poet, "and you ought to be the first to understand and sympathize." Then the parson makes a long and high-falutin speech about his career, and how by hard work and assiduous cultivation of his heavenly bestowed gifts, he had won the "golden hour" in which he had proposed to and been accepted by Candida. The poet is not the slightest bit impressed by all this, and when the parson has finished, bluntly points out to him what it all amounts to. These wonderful utterances are simply the gift of the gab. His enormous congregations do not flock to hear the beautiful truths that he preaches, not a bit of it. They have simply got Prossy's complaint. To this the parson demurs. So the poet suggests that he should write out his sermon and send some one else to preach it and see what happens. And the poet is not content with tearing the parson's precious gift of eloquence to pieces, he is equally remorseless with his love. What does his love for Candida amount to, when he is quite content to sit and watch her trim the lamps and do other dirty work which soils her pretty hands. Altogether the parson has as

bad a quarter of an hour at the hands of the poet as anyone could wish for, and anyone deserve. And the parson is no philosopher. Imagine a preacher who is no philosopher! Something must be done. So he decides, amongst other things, to show how he can trust his wife, or the poet, or both, by going out and leaving them together for an evening. I believe he is not really certain of his own motives, in fact the poor fellow is certain of nothing by this time. He returns in a state of dreadful anxiety to find that nothing particular has happened! Under the circumstances one feels he would almost have been relieved if it had! And so things go on in this unsatisfactory way until the poor parson can really stand them no longer, and he finally brings matters to a head by organizing a most dramatic scene; summoning Candida and bidding her choose between the two of them. Candida's choice is soon made. "I give myself," says she, "to the weaker of the two!" whereupon the parson pulls a very long face and prepares to bid her good-bye! Then, and not till then, he sees where and what he really is. Candida understands him thoroughly, she knows he cannot get on without her and cannot stand alone, now more than ever.

It is a capital scene and may possibly have inspired Sir James Barrie to write "What Every Woman Knows". If it did not do so, the suggestion is after all only a compliment to two fine writers.

But even Candida does not understand the poet. She tries to console him, by comparing their respective ages and pointing out that, in a few years' time, she will be an old woman, while he will still be a young man. "Exactly," says he, "and in a hundred years we will be both the same age!" He then tells them that he

has a secret in his heart, that neither of them can understand, that he is quite happy, and he goes out into the night. But they neither of them guess the secret that is in the poet's heart, and perhaps it is presumption on a critic's part to attempt to penetrate the veil. But the poet has said many things about love in this beautiful little play, and one wonders whether his poetical insight has not enabled him to share, in an even fuller measure and with less toll of suffering, the discovery of Philip Wakem in "The Mill on the Floss".

"Love before it can be disembodied of selfish desire," says Philip, "has to pass through terrible throes". But in the end it does get there and the lover finds contentment and happiness in giving. Is this the secret in the poet's heart?

"Candida" seems to me as flawless in construction and art as any of the plays that preceded it, and very much better than some that have succeeded it! The characterization is delightful and surely true to life. Morell, the parson, is really a fine creature according to his lights, but the author, through the mouth of Eugene, plays havoc with those lights. Candida, out of compliment to whom the play is named, is rather an enigmatical character. One is not quite sure how much or how little she knows!

She certainly understands her husband, though she never quite understands the poet. Prossy, the typewriter, is the sort of satellite without whom no hero, especially a muscular Christian, is complete! Old Burgess is an effective character. An old scoundrel who makes everybody uncomfortable and suspicious when he shows unaccustomed signs of honest dealing. The play, as a whole, is of course very agitating and

turns all one's previous notions of "the good, the beautiful, and the true" inside out and upside down; in short it gives one a moral shaking up, but one cannot find fault with it as a play, on that account.

"Candida" is followed in the book by "The Man of Destiny," which would surely be classed among the unpleasant plays by hero worshippers. It exhibits the great Napoleon in a very human and unheroic light, and it must surely be very unpleasant to them to realize that the great Emperor was not only human, but somewhat commonplace as well. Common is an even better word. He is depicted, and very convincingly depicted, as an unspeakable little cad, quite unable to appreciate or understand what are technically known as the instincts of a gentleman. Whether such instincts are really worth understanding or not seems to be an open question after going through a course of Shaw!

The play contains in one place a long indictment against England and especially her habit of colonization.

One is not quite sure whether this is Napoleonic or Shavian. If it is Napoleonic, it is perhaps characteristic. Napoleon was never quite just to England, although when he had to throw himself on somebody's mercy, he preferred to do so on hers.

On the other hand, assuming, and it is not altogether an unwarrantable assumption, that the author is speaking to us through the mouthpiece of Napoleon—which is a great compliment to both of them, the indictment is not altogether worthy of Mr. Shaw, whose business in life is not to take sides. He omits one very important English characteristic. The love, or spirit of adventure. The English colonization habit is not merely grab, but the outcome of this unquenchable roving spirit.

Bismarck was said to have defined colonization as going for what you want, getting it, and keeping it. The love of adventure has something in it that stands for more than mere acquisition of property. There is a wish for a wider horizon, more freedom and greater scope for usefulness.

But this is all really beside the mark, in a criticism of the play as a play. It is surely an admirable one-act play. The incident it comprises is just an act in the career of the Man of Destiny.

There is a great difference between a one-act play and one act of a play. "The Twelve-pound Look," admirable though it undoubtedly is, is really the last act of a play, so I am inclined to think is Mr. Shaw's "Shewing up of Blanco Posnet". The difficulty in this kind of one-acter is to get all the necessary explaining done quickly and convincingly, but Mr. Shaw and Sir James Barrie surmount it with ease. However, very little explanation of this sort is necessary to "The Man of Destiny". It is just a one-act play. The girl passes in and out of Napoleon's life at this moment. He is a Man of Destiny and such little episodes are just "by the way". It was probably only just "by the way" as far as the girl was concerned too, at the time, but in after life when Napoleon had risen to the summit of his giddy eminence, it may quite possibly have become her whole existence. At the same time one does not wish to vilify the young lady. The curtain falls upon the pair sitting with their heads very close together; with an ordinary couple this might mean little or nothing, but when one of them happens to be "The Man of Destiny" one's suspicions are justly aroused!

The last of the pleasant comedies is, I believe, the

most popular. "You Never Can Tell" is as nearly pure farce as, perhaps, anything that the author has yet given us, with the possible exception of "How He Lied to Her Husband," a parody on his own play of Candida. The characters in "You Never Can Tell" are seldom, if ever met with in real life, and yet they seem to be real enough. The twins, Gloria Clandon, Valentine, the dentist, and William, the Napoleonic waiter, are all highly improbable and exceptional, and yet they never seem impossible, not even in the extraordinarily prosaic atmosphere into which the author introduces them. First in the operating room of a dentist, and afterwards in a commonplace hotel at a commonplace seaside town!

Two of the characters, Crampton and the browbeating, overbearing King's counsel, Bohun, are denizens of the world as it is. The others seem rather to inhabit the world as it ought to be, or as the author thinks it ought to be. And I am bound to say that his world is more entertaining and free than ours is! But there is practically no preaching and no propaganda in "You Never Can Tell". It is just an irresponsible go-as-you-please farce, full of perfectly legitimate fun caused by the clash and play of characters, whose exceptional brilliancy and spirits contribute to form a hilariously entertaining comedy. This explains its popular success. Mr. Shaw sets out to entertain and nine-tenths of the folk who visit theatres go there to be entertained.

The next volume of plays is entitled "Three Plays for Puritans". Typical Puritans will probably find them very much too pure. There is not enough for them to cavil at. In the customary and characteristic preface the author explains why they are for Puritans. Briefly his statement seems to me to amount to the fact that there

is no sex element, or rather that the sex element is not depended upon in any shape or form as the main attraction. The mere mention of such a fact should surely be sufficient to scare away the average audience, but yet these three plays have attracted and are still attracting very large audiences in many different parts of the world. And they deserve to do so, for they are capital plays, every one of them, and one especially touches many moments of real grandeur. The same preface, by the way, also explains why or perhaps one should say "where" these plays are better than Shakespeare. The section of the preface that comes under this caption rouses the ire of all Shakespearean idolaters and the interest of all genuine Shakespearean students. But there is nothing very alarming in it. It is perfectly true. All plays that are any good at all, written in the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth centuries, are surely better than Shakespeare in some respects. As a professional Reader of Plays I have read thousands of plays, but scarcely one out of which Shakespeare could not have got something! We *know* more than he did! Shakespeare's plays are full of artificial soliloquies and asides, and such adventitious asides to effect, which Shaw would scorn to use, and gets along very much more quickly and better without. But he does not claim that his plays are better than Shakespeare in every respect, or even on the whole. He would be a fool if he did. He would also be a fool if he did not see that in some ways he begins where Shakespeare left off. In short, his preface is nothing more nor less than a very healthy antidote to the foolish and futile idolatry that I have spoken of in the introduction to this volume. Most of Mr. Shaw's prefaces are antidotes to some poison

or other, and also aids to the digestion of his own plays.

The first of the "Three Plays for Puritans" is "The Devil's Disciple". This is frankly described by the author as a melodrama and often fiercely decried by the critics as the same. If it is so, it belies the old description of melodrama as "bad drama".

Personally I consider "Primitive Drama" more descriptive of melodrama. Perhaps "The Drama of Conflict" would be best of all. Some say, Mr. Shaw among them, that conflict is absolutely essential to drama, but is that really so? One can conceive a dramatic situation in which there has been no conflict at all. Cannot agreement produce drama? Many forces working together in agreement to one end? I believe that when the Forth Bridge was all but completed the two great central spans did not meet together by many inches, if not feet. But presently the sun came out, the metal expanded under its benign influence, and the two ends met, were clamped into place, and the bridge was complete. Was not that a dramatic moment?

But melodrama or not melodrama, "The Devil's Disciple" is certainly a very good play with a first-rate plot. Minister Anderson is a servant of God and a disciple of Christianity. Richard Dudgeon calls himself the Devil's Disciple. That is to say he has renounced the god of his fathers, and gives himself up wholly and sincerely to worshipping the devil—their devil. As a matter of fact, of course, his devil is a vastly superior being to their god, and has succeeded in turning him into a very honest, straightforward, if somewhat blunt and plain-spoken individual.

They, on the other hand, are hypocritical humbugs

who, when they do or see something so horrible that they dare not face it, promptly attribute it to their god, and in short make him do all the dirty work, as people so often do.

The scene of "The Devil's Disciple" is laid in "New England" during the American War of Secession or Independence, or whatever is its correct historical designation. The Georgian troops, apparently it would be very inaccurate to call them British, under General Burgoyne, have taken possession of the little town in which Richard Dudgeon and Minister Anderson live. On such occasions it is apparently the custom, if possible, to open proceedings by hanging somebody as a traitor. They pitch upon Minister Anderson, but when they arrive at his house he is not there, but Dick Dudgeon is sitting and taking tea with his wife. Quite innocently, be it noted, as this is the first time that the Devil's Disciple has ventured over the Minister's threshold.

The Minister is broader-minded than his flock and perceives the good in Dick, but his wife is violently antagonistic, hates Dick like poison, and is consequently in danger of falling seriously in love with him at any moment!

When the soldiers arrive on the scene they of course mistake Dick for the Minister, and Dick does all he can to encourage the mistake. He is, at heart, a large-hearted, unselfish man, and when the moment comes can no more take his neck out of the noose, in order to put another man's into it, then he can fly. The poor Minister's wife is quite unable to grasp the situation. All she knows is that a very heroic act has been done, and, being a woman, the least she can do is to fall in love with the doer of it, which she does, and adds very much to his embarrassments!

Of course Dick impresses upon her that she must tell her husband nothing, and equally, of course, she tells him everything, and of course, says the reader, unless he knows his Shaw, the Minister rushes off to explain the mistake. Not a bit of it! What would be the use of that? It would never save Dick, who would still be hanged for aiding and abetting. When a town is under martial law there seems to be only one punishment for everything. If the Minister explained there would only be two dead men in the place of one!

Dick has taken the Minister's place and the Minister will take his. He understands Dick's character better than any one else and makes a pretty shrewd guess as to what he would have done under the circumstances, doffs his Minister's kit, assumes that of a trooper, and rushes off to do what he can to save, not only Richard, but the situation. And he does it and they all live happily ever after, excepting possibly Mrs. Anderson who will always be haunted by the recollection of having made a fool of herself. She implores Dick not to tell on her, and of course he never will, but the husband, who thoroughly understands his wife, probably guesses the truth.

That is the semi-original and altogether admirable plot of this excellent play. I say semi-original, because of course there is nothing new in one person intentionally taking another's place on the scaffold. It has been done scores of times (no one knows that better than Mr. Shaw), but surely never once from such a motive. Richard Dudgeon's action is one of pure, unselfish chivalry, not the sort of chivalry that was wont to save a woman and then claim her. He does a good action for its own sake. But, apparently, this is not sufficient

reason for the public, who, like the girl in the play, consider that Richard should, by all the canons of art, literature, life, and the drama, be in love with her, before he could be induced to do such a thing as sacrifice his own life for her husband's.

I understand that, at one time when the play was not doing particularly well, and the redoubtable author was well out of the way for the time being, the booking suddenly leaped up, and business became very brisk. Mr. Shaw suspected that something was up and discovered that the actor who played the part of Richard had popularized the play, peopled the theatre, and ruined the situation, by grasping a few strands of the girl's back hair and kissing them fervently at the crucial moment, transforming a really disinterested and noble deed into a piece of clap-trap.

In the "Tale of Two Cities" every one applauds the action of Sydney Carton, who does what he does for the sake of the girl he loves, and knows he never can get; and without whom his life is not worth living. His is undoubtedly a noble act, but dwindles in comparison to that of Evremonde's, the second hero of the book, who puts his head into the lion's jaw for the sake of an old steward and humanity in general, incidentally also running the risk of losing the girl, whom he *has* got. Yet, as a rule, Sydney Carton's deed is applauded at the expense of Evremonde's. Audiences seem unable to understand or appreciate a good action for its own sake. A few years ago a version of the story of Joseph was produced in London, in which the chief reason that Joseph did not get entangled with Potiphar's wife was because he was after somebody else!

"The Devil's Disciple" is, as the author himself has

pointed out, a typical melodrama, or perhaps more correctly early Victorian drama, with all the old stock situations: "The reading of the will," "The mistaken identity," "The trial" and "Saved by the skin of his teeth". But they are all served up in a new way and therein lies the attraction. One would rather meet an old friend in a new coat than a new one in an old one. Of all the scenes I like the trial scene best. The dialogue is delicious, depending for its point not so much upon the wit of the speakers themselves, as upon the situation. In fact the author is the humorist. I do not mean by that that Mr. Shaw has collected a lot of little miniatures of himself who let off Shavian fireworks, but he has conceived a succession of situations which accentuate and bring into strong relief the humorous aspect of the scene, which is surely the true art of comedy. For instance—the great English General Burgoyne is the general commanding the troops in possession. What more natural than he should preside at the court-martial on Richard Dudgeon. But General Burgoyne is, unlike many of his tribe, neither pompous nor unduly officious. He knows perfectly well when they can get along without him, and hands the court-martial over to an overbearing cad called Major Swindon, whilst he himself occupies the position of a sort of assessor on the bench. Naturally the Devil's Disciple addresses the president as "General". But the cad is only a major; and as the general is present, has to correct Richard's mistake.

"A thousand pardons!" says the D.D. "I thought I had the honour of addressing Gentlemanly Johnny!" —which is the pleasant nickname by which General Burgoyne was known.

This is a good instance of the sort of sprightly, un-

conscious comedy that runs through the whole scene, indeed through the entire play.

In introducing General Burgoyne, and being at such pains to get him and the incident of his surrender historically accurate, the author has vindicated the character and done a deed of real justice to a man who seems to have been really great. His character as drawn in the play, has certainly very fine characteristics and rings very true.

The other characters are also beautifully drawn, especially those of the two heroes, the Devil's Disciple and the Minister.

If one is to compare the actions of the two men at the critical moment, I should say that the Minister's is, possibly, the more heroic. Dick risked his life, in fact he threw it away, but the Minister risked something very much more valuable, his reputation. No one would have understood his motives had his action not succeeded. The fact that he did not at once go and explain the mistake would have damned him for ever, and life would never again have been worth living for him. But, of course, the Minister, who seems to have understood Dick Dudgeon, believed he was acting in the same way as Dick would have done under the circumstances, so they are both very exceptional men, and "The Devil's Disciple" is a play with two heroes, and no heroine!

The next play, "Cæsar and Cleopatra," is a *magnum opus*. It seems generally to be considered that when approaching this subject the author, being on holy ground, should have taken off his boots. Whether the ground is holy because Shakespeare had been there before, or Cæsar got there first, is never quite clear. But in any case Mr. Shaw is not the man to write on tiptoe.

What Shakespeare does with the old Greek heroes in "Troilus and Cressida," Mr. Shaw does with Julius Cæsar. He shows him to be a human being. But he has the advantage of Shakespeare in that he has got very much better material to work upon.

Julius Cæsar was, after all, only a man. If he re-entered the world to-morrow we should all rise to our feet to greet him. But I doubt if any of us would go down on our knees. So much for the ground hallowed by Cæsar. Now for Shakespeare. Julius Cæsar was the inspiration, the cause of one of Shakespeare's noblest and grandest tragedies. He does not figure as the central figure of the tragedy, the play is not written round him, nor is it a character study of him. We are simply shown a little glimpse of a very great man, at his worst, often, by the way, made still worse by the actor. It is not often that one can find a chink in Mr. Shaw's armour, but I believe there is one here, and I plunge my knife into it with the greatest glee. I gather from what he says in his preface to Julius Cæsar (one dare not do more than "gather" from Mr. Shaw), that he considers Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar either to be a poor character study or the study of a poor character, but it is surely not a study at all, it is merely a glimpse, and a very possible glimpse, like Mr. Shaw's own glimpse of Napoleon in "The Man of Destiny". Does he expect that to be regarded as a complete character study? As far as hallowed ground is concerned Julius Cæsar is very little trodden by Shakespeare. He has certainly by no means been all over it, and it is high time it was tilled by some dramatist, and no one is better qualified by both sanity and sympathy than Mr. Shaw. We had "Antony and Cleopatra" and now we have "Cæsar

and Cleopatra" and there we must stop, for it appears that that young lady was not nearly so black as she is sometimes painted.

She is not to be compared with Lady Hamilton. If she had thought less of herself and more of the drama Antony might not have been the last!

"Cæsar and Cleopatra," like Mr. Shaw's other plays, is so good that very little serious objection can be taken to it as a work of art, and critics have had to fall back upon the colloquial, in some places slangy, dialogue and the modernity of the play as a whole, to find fault with. But Julius Cæsar certainly must have talked colloquially. He was no pedant and, as he was no prig either, he probably occasionally talked slang. There was one thing he certainly did not talk, and that was English. Therefore, when translating his talk into English, one must give as nearly as possible the equivalent of what he did say, and I dare venture to say that modern colloquial talk is very much nearer that than ancient and academical blank verse. As for his character and the other characters in the play, their modernity does not strike one as so incongruous as the fact that they are alive and live in this world. They did! But somehow one has always looked upon them as living in a classical, or perhaps Shakespearean world. Shakespeare's characters are alive, but they are not entirely denizens of this world. I do not mean that they are not human. They are human beings living in Shakespeare's world, or rather the stage world of his day; a world of blank verse and sometimes blanker poetry, into which he, with his transcendent genius, infused life and real poetry. In a sense Shakespeare, with the assistance of the stage and human nature, has created a world of art, in much

the same sense that Turner created a work of art out of a landscape and his palette. Shaw does not attempt that, but paints for us a glimpse of the Cæsarean world as he considers it might have appeared at that time. To me, at any rate, it seems a very convincing picture indeed. Human nature changes very little, human knowledge very considerably. And human types are curiously limited. I believe that one would find in any savage tribe in Central Africa many exact prototypes of what one finds in civilized London, and have myself noticed it among natives in the Soudan.

The principal characters of "Cæsar and Cleopatra" are Julius Cæsar, the great chief; Cleopatra, the dangerous, ambitious woman, who knows her own power; Ftatateeta, her grim nurse, "the woman who knows"; Rufio, the old soldier; Apollodorus, the artist and dandy; and Britannus, the typical Englishman. He, of course, one finds nowhere but in England. This is no insult to England. Every country has its type, but they are seldom or never in the majority in that country. You may travel for days in any land and never meet one, then you may run across him in some foreign country. Cæsar probably kept Britannus as a souvenir or trophy as well as because he was the right material for a very valuable secretary; a man who might attach undue importance to trifles to which Cæsar himself would never give their proper due. These are the principal characters who work out this very excellent play. Roughly this is the plot, or story of the play. Cæsar takes rather a fancy to Cleopatra, and decides to put her on the throne and give her a kingdom, and then gets so interested in the gift, that he almost forgets the person for whom it is intended, especially as that young lady

shows a doubtful method of appreciating the compliment. But this gift is nothing to her to the one Cæsar proposes to send out to her when he gets home, namely Antony.

But even the mighty Julius Cæsar does not fully realize the danger of putting a weapon into the hands of a woman with her own ideas of what is fair in war, and he has some ugly and exceedingly dramatic surprises.

The play is a long one, in five acts. To my sense, there is not a dull moment in it, many very dramatic ones, and some very grand ones. Cæsar's apostrophe to the Sphinx is a grand piece of work, so also is his quickness in seizing the opportunity, when all Alexandria is trying to put out its flaming library, to build up the future on the ashes of the past. The whole of the last scene of Act IV, the dinner-party on the house-top, is most grimly, intensely and weirdly dramatic. The semi-betrayal of Cleopatra to Cæsar by Pothinus, the latter's murder by Ftatateeta at Cleopatra's instigation, and the final murder of Ftatateeta by the blunt soldier Rufio are most dramatic.

The character of Cæsar, as written here, is surely that of a very great man. He sees very much farther than those around him, who refuse to believe in his long-headed, far-seeing clemency. He is not oppressed by the weight of his own cleverness, so much as by that of other people's stupidity. He is wonderfully quick at seizing his opportunity when it comes, but he neither forces it, nor makes it, he just waits for it, knowing that it is bound to come. He is entirely without fussiness of any kind, and his casualness continually keeps his staff on tenterhooks of anxiety. In fact he annoys and upsets them all considerably, in the first place, but satisfies them in the second. Julius Cæsar is a fine, calm piece

of portraiture, thoroughly worthy of its subject, as is indeed the whole of this very fine play.

Cleopatra is drawn as a kitten, just beginning, with Cæsar's help, to realize the length of her claws. The murder of Pothinus at her instigation is a gruesome hint of the possibilities of this kitten, when it has grown to be a cat. But the Cleopatra at the opening of the play is a delightful creature, and the first scene between her and Cæsar at the Sphinx, when she offers him the other paw to sit on, is delicious. "Cæsar and Cleopatra" has never achieved the success in London that it has in the provinces and in America, although it has always been presented to us, beautifully acted, by Sir J. Forbes Robertson and his company. I think, somehow, that the Shakespearean superstition and Lyceum tradition of London has never quite been broken down. It is still a shock to the Londoner to hear Julius Cæsar talk plain, even slangy English; either that or the name and nature of a classical play frightens him away. One also sometimes hears that the amount of talk in the play is intolerable to a modern audience. That is a complaint which is often levelled at a Shaw play, but personally, as I have already said, I have never heard or seen an audience complain whilst they are in the theatre, although they sometimes recollect that they really were bored when the play is over!

"Cæsar and Cleopatra" is succeeded, in the "Plays for Puritans," by "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," a delightful comedy, with a *real* heroine for a heroine. Lady Cecily Wayneflete is a person who knows not fear, principally perhaps because, in a sense, she always minds her own business. In one sense she interferes with nobody and nobody interferes with her; in another

she makes everybody's business her own and manages it so beautifully for them, and in such an unexpected way, that they generally find that the business has gone to pieces, whilst they personally have made great advances! She has been right across Africa and interviewed various cannibal chiefs, who have at first received her with every intention of eating her, and afterwards detained her in the hope of marrying her. This is rather the case with Captain Brassbound. He is a species of outlaw, a man whose hand is against all society, and whose principal means of livelihood seems to be acting as agent to the hill tribes and brigands of Morocco. With his crew of rapscallions and odds and ends of all descriptions he escorts parties of Europeans to various sacred fastnesses amid the Moroccan hills and Atlas mountains, at so much per head. By the terms of his contract with the various chiefs he has to confine his clientèle to Jews and infidels. Lady Cecily arrives at Mogador on the coast of Morocco, in company with her brother-in-law, Sir Howard Hallam, a Judge of the English high court. She, of course, wishes to go to some place into which no European has hitherto dared to penetrate. Acting on the advice of a certain missionary, she engages Captain Brassbound and his motley crew as escort. Ordinarily speaking, Captain Brassbound would probably refuse the job, as Lady Cecily and Sir Howard are both of them Christians. Sir Howard has, of course, been let in for the expedition against his will by Lady Cecily. But Captain Brassbound has his own particular reason for wishing to bring off this "coup". The judge, though he does not know it, is Brassbound's uncle. But Brassbound knows it, and considers he has justifiable and reasonable private

grounds for a personal spite against his uncle. Superficially he certainly does seem to have right on his side; but if there is one thing one can be certain of in a Shaw play, it is that when things appear to be all right on the surface, they are all wrong underneath, and vice versâ. Captain Brassbound's little plan is to get even with Sir Howard by getting him into the clutches of an Arab chief, where, as an infidel, he will be fortunate if he is killed outright. Brassbound will stick at nothing to accomplish this end, not even at sacrificing Lady Cecily if need be. However he does not succeed because, fortunately for him, Lady Cecily sets about to accomplish his beginning, and set things right generally. In order to do this she has first to convince the Captain that he is all wrong, and that he himself is no better than the judge, after which she has to prove to a fiery Arab chief and an American court-martial that Brassbound is all right. To do this she never exceeds the limits of the truth, but seldom reaches them. Her plan is to tell as much of the truth as is necessary to produce the impression she desires to give, and as it is always a very good impression of everybody, she has no scruples. She is a great believer in point of view. Everything depends upon the point of view. And as she is not afraid of anybody she has very little difficulty in bringing them round to her point of view. In fact, they see so much eye to eye with her by the time she has finished with them, that, like the cannibal chiefs, they generally want to marry her. Captain Brassbound does. He demands it as a right. Under the circumstances he has the right to do so. She has completely wrecked his old idea of himself, deprived him of his object in life, and left him without any visible means of support. The least she can do

is to support him herself. He has right and reason on his side, and he has something more. For the first time in her life Lady Cecily finds herself slowly but surely succumbing to the mesmeric influence of a man, coming under the spell of what is technically known as "a strong man's love". Then the signal gun booms out from Brassbound's ship, *The Thanksgiving*, and Lady Cecil wakes from her trance and Captain Brassbound from his illusion. Lady Cecily is not for him, or rather he is not for her. She is for all men or all women whom she can help or who come under her benign influence. Captain Brassbound's conversion is complete. He has been converted into a man from a silly, pettifogging little instrument of twopenny-halfpenny vengeance, whose one ambition has been to get even, that is, equal with a man he despises. The curtain descends upon Lady Cecily overwhelmed alike with her triumph and her escape.

"Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is a rich, refreshing comedy quite flawless in its own way. I have never heard any one have any serious fault to find with it, except perhaps that Lady Cecily Wayneflete is an impossible character. It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by that. Perhaps such a character does not exist, and never has existed, but surely that is no reason why she should not. She is the incarnation of common sense, sympathy and unselfishness provoking a divine fearlessness. She knows that she has nothing to fear from any one if she will only look at things from their point of view, and she is not a bit afraid of doing that much. She never does anything so silly as to beard the lion in his den, but gently strokes his mane in his lair, until he begins to purr. Then she has got him on her side. If such women did not exist before Mr. Shaw

wrote his play, they may do so afterwards and Lady Cecily will be the mother of them all. But this sort of criticism is really futile. If Lady Cecily Wayneflete is not possible, she ought to be; just as it ought to be possible to get from London to Paris in less than four hours. "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is an exhilarating, stimulating comedy, with an admirable plot and single purpose: the turning inside out of Captain Brassbound. He has lived his life on an illusion, and the dispelling of such an illusion from such a man, by such means, is an admirable theme for a comedy. In the choice of it the author shows himself to be a true dramatist and comedian. He also shows himself to be an artist. Any one who knows the Near East at all well, would think that the author of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" knew it very well indeed. The Scottish missionary and his garden, the Arabs and their ruined Moorish castle, Captain Brassbound and his rapscallions are all common objects of this particular seashore. Mr. Shaw has told us that all his first-hand knowledge of the East was culled from one book and one afternoon's walk through the streets of Tangier. Perhaps, too, consciously or unconsciously, memories of Rider Haggard have been laid under contribution for the Scottish missionary and his garden! But what does it matter? No one is a penny the worse. Mr. Shaw is much the richer for his play and so is English literature.

The next play on the list is "The Admirable Bashville," a dramatic version, in the Elizabethan style, of his novel "Cashel Byron's Profession". Amongst many others one of the objects of this play, I understand, is to show how easy it is to write telling, indeed good, blank verse. Mr. Shaw says it is simply a trick.

If that is so he has certainly got the hang of it, for there are some fine speeches in "The Admirable Bashville". The play also contains one of the most richly humorous and really funny scenes that any dramatist, Shakespeare included, has yet written. Cetewayo, the great Zulu chieftain, figures in the play. He is on his visit (!) to London, and by way of a change from classical concerts, is taken to the Royal Agricultural Hall to see a prize fight. He arrives most absurdly got up in his own version of an English dress suit, with his splendid head encircled by the Zulu ring of royalty, a fine halo, if ever there was one. He is politely armed with knobkerries, assegaies and such things. When he first catches sight of the audience, he gives a groan of disgust and despair. "Is this the great English nation? Why, if we had known they were like that, I and my braves would have eaten them up!" says he, or words to that effect. Then preparations for the fight begin. The boxers don their gloves. "What are those things for?" asks Cetewayo, and somebody explains that they are to prevent the combatants hurting each other too much. Cetewayo groans again. Another disappointment! He thought he was going to see a *fight!* He is mildly sarcastic, for a Zulu, and asks whether they have brought their nurses with them. Then the grim old warrior resigns himself to something worse even than a classical concert. The fight commences. As it proceeds Cetewayo becomes more and more restless, his scorn and disgust corresponding to the, to him, ridiculous enthusiasm of the audience. But he manages to contain himself in his chair until the conclusion, but then when the audience are wildly cheering the victor, who is no little pleased with himself, Cetewayo can no longer contain himself,

and dashes at the wretched man with his knobkerrie. Then he starts laying about him right and left, and in a very few minutes the hall is completely cleared and the curtain descends upon the redoubtable Zulu sprawling face downwards on the platform, banging on the floor with his knobkerrie, and yelling Ya! Ya! Ya! and various Zulu war cries, with the bitter, impotent rage of a frenzied warrior who feels he has been had.

After this occurrence his hosts will be wiser and confine the entertainments on his behalf to the classical concerts and tame animals at the Zoo. The present writer was fortunate enough to see this great scene played some years ago at the Afternoon Theatre at His Majesty's Theatre, and never expects, never hopes, and never wishes to see a better piece of fooling or comic acting. The prize-fight, as played by Messrs. Edward Sass and Ben Webster, was the very essence of the art of acting and producing. There was never a bruise upon the combatants, but they produced the effect of being black and blue with them; not a drop of blood, but yet they seemed to be covered with it. The final exhaustion and defeat of Edward Sass had to be seen to be believed—and then it was believed! The illusion was perfect. I do not know who was responsible for the production of this scene, but can imagine that it was no other than the gifted author who conceived it.

"The Admirable Bashville" is quite a subordinate character in the play, a footman who rigorously keeps his place. That is why he is admirable. He is in love with the heroine, but—he keeps his place.

Play number twelve is "Man and Superman". It has a volume all to itself and it needs it, for though an admirable play it really does need a lot of explaining,

to the ordinary conventional individual accustomed to look at things as he thinks they are. As a play it seems to me to mark a distinct epoch or period in the author's career as a playwright. Hitherto he has been, on the whole, very conventional in his methods, if not in his ideas. He has obeyed all the rules of the game. Now he is going to be less conventional and less obedient. Hitherto he has compelled us to listen, now he is going to compel us to think.

The plot of "Man and Superman" is simple and straightforward, like all Mr. Shaw's plots. A certain man, by name Bernard Sh— I mean John Tanner, holds very strong views upon women. He considers that the prevailing notion that man is the pursuer and woman the pursued is the exact reverse of the truth. A certain young friend of his is a willing captive in the toils of the woman to whom John Tanner has been appointed guardian. Tanner tries to make his young friend realize the position, but the young friend has not the slightest wish to wake up out of such a beautiful dream. Suddenly Tanner perceives that there is no fear of "love's young dream" ever being disturbed by the reality as far as this young man is concerned. The woman has no intention of marrying him. She is after some one else, and that some one else is John Tanner himself. There is nothing else for it but flight, instant and precipitous. Tanner jumps on to his motor-car and careers half-way across Europe, jumping the Channel, Pyrenees and various rivers in one bound each; but he is caught, and captured, before he has reached the Mediterranean. The play is divided into three parts, the plot, the chase, and the capture. In the first act the train is laid, in the second the victim realizes that he is in the toils and

makes a frantic effort to escape, the third act is the chase and the incidents of the chase, and the fourth is the capture and the usual revelation to the victim of the tragedy of how he has been caught. It is during the chase that Mr. Shaw begins to get a little unconventional and unconfined, and to spread his wings a little. Tanner and his chauffeur burst a tyre, or something, and are captured by brigands, and whilst quietly sleeping under their protection Tanner dreams a dream in which he seems to be playing the part of Don Juan in some former existence, and in Hell. This dream in itself is a small drama, and is so cleverly fitted into the rest of the play that it can be taken out and played separately, which is sometimes a great relief. The scene of it is laid in Hell, and we are taken back to the middle ages and shown Don Juan, who bears a very extraordinary resemblance to John Tanner ; Donna Ana, who seems the prototype of Anne Whitefield in the play. The Devil is the chief of the brigands, and The Statue, the father-in-law of Ana, Tanner's fellow-guardian to Anne, a pompous conventional Englishman called Roebuck Ramsden. Don Juan is bored to death, or rather to tears, you cannot get bored to death when you are immortal, with Hell. The Statue is bored stiff with Heaven, where the inhabitants are all good and respectable, the music all classical and the pictures all strictly beautiful and good.

Everything and everybody in Heaven, Earth and Hell, are then discussed at very great length, especially by Don Juan, whose only rival as a talker in fiction is John Tanner, in fact is Bernard Shaw. The talk is interminable, appalling in its volume, and makes one's head ache. Of course it is very good talk, and very interesting and very convincing, but a good dinner,

however well cooked, gives one indigestion if one has too much of it. But the act is capital and stimulating reading, but I found it difficult to follow on the stage. That, of course, is probably quite as much my fault as the play's. One's brain, accustomed, perhaps, to do its work sluggishly, found it difficult to follow so rapidly, just as the ear, accustomed to hearing blank verse mouthed and declaimed, finds it difficult to follow when spoken correctly. Of course, all this talk is very much in the picture. Hell, I am told by those who ought to know, is all talk. Only in Heaven is there occasionally silence for a space. But all this talk leads to a definite result. Don Juan and The Statue decide to change places, but Donna Ana seems to see that they are both of them on the wrong tack. What is really wanted is a superior place and a superior being. A superman in fact. Somebody must give birth to him, and that is her ambition, to bear the Immortal Son to the Immortal Father. At first this all seems a little mystic, irrelevant, and it is difficult to see what it has got to do with the play. The connexion between the dream and the reality is as vague to the audience as it is to John Tanner and his fellow-mortals and dreamers, but there does seem to me to be some connexion. It almost appears as if this third act were one of Mr. Shaw's antidotes. "Man and Superman" is rather a bitter pill to swallow, and the antidote or rather digestive is given to us half-way through, to help with the digestion of what follows. John Tanner is caught by Anne, there is no escape, so he yields with as bad a grace as he can. The last words of Anne when once she has safely got him in her clutches are, "Let him talk". There is no way out for Tanner, and no way out for any ordinary mortal,

but Mr. Shaw seems, by his antidote, to hold out to us a hope that there is a way out somewhere, that something may some day happen outside of ourselves and save us. In fact he makes us all into Micawbers. I sometimes think he is a bit of a Micawber himself. It is better to wait for something to turn up, than to be satisfied with what you have got, if you have not got enough!

But this paper is not an examination of Mr. Shaw's philosophy, but of his plays. In the present instance the two are so entwined that one cannot altogether separate them. In "Arms and the Man," "Captain Brassbound" and even "Mrs. Warren's Profession" an audience could divorce themselves from the subject of the play and laugh on the right side of their faces all the time, but it is not so in "Man and Superman". Mr. Shaw is determined to make every man and woman in his audience think, and achieves his object, which is a feather in the cap of his play. He does it by choosing a subject that comes home to every one of them. "Man and Superman" is a love play, though scarcely a romantic one. There is not a soul in the theatre whom he does not reach. They are all either deeply interested, vastly entertained, considerably annoyed or profoundly shocked.

When the present writer visited the play he sat in solitary state in his seat surrounded by a lot of "mammas". It was interesting to watch the smile travel from the right side of their faces to the wrong as John Tanner proceeded with his speech upon the subject of mammas. But one must remember that Tanner is a bit of an artist and very much of a special pleader, and naturally makes out a very strong case. What he says may be the truth,

but it is not all the truth, not always the truth, and he could plead quite as eloquently on behalf of the mammas, as Mr. Shaw can on behalf of Mrs. Warren. As for John Tanner's discovery and reversal of the supposed state of things, what if it is so? Are they any worse or any better than they were before? If we suddenly discovered that the world went round the other way, would any of us fall off? Whether the man catches the woman or the woman the man the climax is generally pretty much the same. We are all bound upon the wheel, as the Buddhists say. What matter which way it is going round?

In "Man and Superman" Mr. Shaw increases his gallery of portraits. John Tanner is, of course, a near relation of The Chocolate Soldier and not unconnected with Julius Cæsar. He is one of those Shavian characters who is not afraid to look facts in the face, however ugly they may seem. Anne Whitefield is the "Vampire". Octavius Robinson the sort of amiable, unselfish, weak young man we all know, who perhaps gets as much out of life as most people. As Anne points out, nursing a broken heart may be a very pleasant occupation. It is certainly not so painful as growing a whole one. There is a very amusing American in the play who has decided to cut his son off with a shilling should he marry anything less than a peeress in her own right. So that when he marries a girl who is nothing more than plain Miss Violet Robinson, the marriage has to be kept secret, especially as Violet has the sense to realize that her love will want more room to flourish in than is provided by a cottage. A very amusing scene happens in this connexion. Some time after Violet Robinson's marriage it becomes plain to

her friends and relations that if she is not married she ought to be. They meet together and tear her to shreds, with the exception of John Tanner, who sympathizes with her on principle, and Anne Whitefield, who says nothing. Under the circumstances she might have been expected to say a good deal, and this extraordinary procedure puzzles her friends, until the truth about Violet's marriage is revealed. Then it turns out that Anne knew all about it, an obvious explanation which does not occur to those hot on the trail of a scandal!

The twentieth century brigands, who have to form themselves into a Limited Liability Company and to depend for their swag on broken-down motor-cars, are a very happy touch. But the gem of the play is 'Enry Straker, the chauffeur; the completed product of the Borough Polytechnic, who knows his own business and minds it, but keeps his eyes open at the same time, so that when there is anything else to be done he can do it, if asked. He is thus enabled, after much pressure, to open his master's eyes to the growing danger of Anne Whitefield.

Except for the long digression in the third act "Man and Superman" is a very racy play indeed, taken at a rate that should satisfy even Mr. 'Enry Straker. Things move swiftly in a tragedy, and the play is certainly a tragedy for John Tanner. All the same it is probably not so tragic as he thinks it is and he need not be as frightened as he is of the "Life-Force". He has always been so straightforward with Anne, and has told her so plainly what he thinks of her, that there should be no harsh disillusionment after their marriage, and possibly some pleasant surprises!

A point, by the way, well worth remark in connexion

with the author's treatment of the character of John Tanner is that John has written a revolutionary handbook which has made him famous, or rather infamous. One often sees plays and reads books in which the principal character has done something of the sort, but one seldom sees any signs of the book in the character. In the volume which contains "Man and Superman," Mr. Shaw gives us actual extracts from John Tanner's book, which is evidently a startling production, paradoxical but often most uncomfortably true.

The third act digression in "Man and Superman" certainly delays the swift action of the play very much; the author has sometimes a little weakness for this sort of thing. Taken separately the digression is long-winded and undramatic, except for the end which is dramatic enough, and strikes a note of really solid grandeur.

The next volume contains three plays, two of them of very serious import, and one a burlesque. "John Bull's Other Island," the first of the series, is a political play which was originally written for the Irish National Theatre, but proved at the time it was written too big a thing for the infant society to tackle. Now, I believe, they could tackle anything. "John Bull's Other Island" was produced at the Court Theatre, London; where it was a success in every way. It is a political but yet romantic play, which might well have been called "A Tale of Two Islands". Thomas Broadbent and Laurence Doyle are partners in an engineering firm. Tom may be taken as a typical Englishman, Larry as the typical Irishman, who has left his native country and come over to England. Events take Tom Broadbent to Ireland, where he visits Roscullen, Larry's home, persuading

Larry to come with him. This is not done without some reluctance on Larry's part, for at Roscullen lives Norah Reilly, a girl with whom Larry had once been in love, and who has always been in love with him, and has been sitting expecting his return all these eighteen years. When they do meet again, the meeting is sad and unsatisfactory. They are both Irish to the core. Larry clever and poetic in a sense, noble in mind and body, but vague and discontented, not knowing exactly what he does want, but content with nothing less, whatever it may be. The girl, extraordinarily romantic, delicate natured and refined and longing with a passionate longing for something to do, or be. There is, apparently, no loneliness so terrible and no lot so sad as life in a remote part of Ireland for a girl of Norah's temperament. Then down comes the Englishman, Tom Broadbent, like a wolf on the fold, and Norah is swept into his embrace and becomes engaged to him, principally because she cannot help herself. Tom came into the room and found her weeping after the interview with the seemingly callous Larry. He sympathized with her, and allowed her to weep on his breast, after which, of course, she must marry him. So he carries off the prize, and one cannot help shuddering a little at the thought of this delicate, refined creature in his well-intentioned but heavy hands.

Although this is a story in the play, it can scarcely be called the story of the play, or the plot of the play. Strictly speaking it has no plot, but merely presents a contrast and a problem, and is almost purely a study of character and temperament. The little happening that I have described seems intended by the author to be symbolical of England and Ireland. Tom Broadbent

typifies England, rushing in, setting everything right in his own way, supremely confident that that way is the only way and the right way, and blind alike to the shocks and amusement which he is affording to what he would doubtless call, the natives. Whether or no this is the true position of England in Ireland, it is not our purpose to discuss here, but it is a very effective one indeed for the purposes of Mr. Shaw's play. Tom Broadbent in Ireland causes immense amusement, especially when, in order to ingratiate himself and catch their votes as parliamentary candidate, he gives Matt Haffigan's pig a leg-up in his motor, with very nearly fatal accidents to all concerned!

The pig, when the car starts, jumps out of his pig-skin with fright and on to the driver's lap. In his struggles he then gets his tail under the thing upon which the driver presses his foot to stop the car. The driver who cannot see what has happened, naturally tries to stop the car, but only succeeds in squeezing the life out of the pig's tail. The result of it all is a series of accidents which appeal very strongly to the very delicate sense of humour of the native mind!

There is a deal of political talk in the play, which is in some ways almost a propaganda, but is none the less interesting for all that. But the strongest attraction lies in the sympathy and charm with which Bernard Shaw has drawn his fellow countrymen and women. There are two priests in the play, the political village priest, who has every one under his thumb, and one Father Keegan, unfrocked by a Christian denomination, because he once showed Christian compassion for a black man. The children of the village are now forbidden to call him Father, but they do it all the same. Being the

sanest member of the community, who is not afraid to look everything in the face, he is naturally regarded as a madman by the other members, who, however, are rather upset when he looks upon himself as such. They all look up to him in secret. He is something of a mystic and something of a very practical Christian who lives his faith. His head may be in the clouds, but his eyes penetrate very far below the surface, and beyond the horizon. His beautiful speech at the end of the play, though symbolical and mystical, is none the less practical. Keegan is one of the author's most inspiring studies and a character who will live. Many other folk besides those who live in the little community of Roscullen may be glad, some day, to fall back upon him.

In contrasting the Englishman with the Irishman Mr. Shaw is very severe and perhaps not quite fair. He gives a false impression by contrasting two types. The typical Irishman is a delightful fellow, the typical Englishman anything but that. Both types are by no means in the majority.

Moreover, the situation is one which perhaps brings out the best of one and the worst of the other. The Irishman is notoriously a good host, an Englishman is generally at his worst in a strange land. A guest is seldom so much at his ease as his host. An Englishman in Ireland is, perhaps, too liable to think that he is being looked up to, an Irishman in England too ready to believe that he is being looked down upon. Great stress is laid upon Tom Broadbent's egotism and self-satisfaction, whilst the peculiarly Irish national vanity is not in evidence at all. But it generally is when an Englishman is about. Of course all nations have their vanity, but in Ireland it is sometimes apt to be ridi-

culous. If bull-fighting were mentioned at a Dublin dinner-party some one would volunteer the information, perfectly seriously, that all the greatest matadors are Irishmen, probably Dublin or even Sandymount men. Sandymount is a small suburb of Dublin.

I was once at a debate of the Historical Society of Trinity College, Dublin. The subject under discussion was the Irish character, and the president of the society read a paper in which, as far as a Sassenach is capable of judging, the Irish character seemed very faithfully set forth with its virtues and faults. But afterwards, one by one, different distinguished Irishmen stood up and strenuously denied the blemishes until finally the Irish character stood revealed in all the white flower of its spotless purity! The most self-satisfied body of Englishmen that ever constituted a board of guardians could have done no more for themselves! For the pick of a nation that prides itself upon its sense of humour, solemnly to sit round and discuss, or even listen to a discussion of, its own characteristics is surely a lapse. Moreover, a sense of humour does not usually beget pride but gratitude. However, this little vanity may not be really characteristic, but only a little silliness stuck on for the benefit or annoyance of the Sassenach. If so it should certainly have been about when Tom Broadbent was.

Some critics consider the superstitious peasant boy, Patsey Farrel, overdrawn, but they have evidently never been in Ireland, or they would have met him on the very landing-stage. Mr. Shaw contrasts the genuine Irishman in the play with a sort of stage Irishman, who appears in the first act, and shows us very clearly that such frauds exist off the stage as well as on.

On the whole, John Bull is a very serious contribution to the Irish question, and any Englishman who is thinking of settling it should certainly read or see it.

As a play it is difficult to criticize. There is very little definitely wrong with it, at the same time there is not anything very definitely right. Nothing much for the unfortunate critic to catch hold of either way. It has slightly more plot than the average musical comedy; but is purely a play of situation, character and temperament, and for that reason throws very much more light upon the Irish question than a thousand blue books. In the evolution of Mr. Shaw as a dramatist it is very interesting, for it is one of the first plays that seem obviously written with a purpose. "Man and Superman" is the result of a discovery, "John Bull's Other Island" the discovery and exposure of a result and some hints to future experimenters.

The next important play is "Major Barbara". It is preceded in the volume by the clever and witty one-act burlesque of "Candida," called "How He Lied to Her Husband". "Major Barbara" is worse than "John Bull". There is less plot, less situation, less characterization and very much more talk. This is not to say that what little plot, situation, etc., there is is not very good indeed, because it is. Whatever Mr. Shaw does he does well. "Major Barbara" might be given a fuller title and called "The Conversion of Major Barbara". She is converted from one idea to another. She begins life, as far as the play is concerned, as an ardent Salvationist and helper of the poor, and ends it as an ardent supporter of Andrew Undershaft's contention that poverty is a crime, and that the best way to get rid of it is, perhaps, by treating it as such. Like most of Shaw's

heroes and heroines she is turned inside out. She sets out to reform the world and suddenly finds the world reforming her. Her situation when this is first brought home to her seems very desperate. The rock upon which she stands seems to slip from under her feet. The army has failed her, and she gives vent to her feelings in the agonizing cry: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" The introduction of this phrase has been regarded by many as blasphemous, but surely it is not so, but, on the contrary, convincing and natural. Barbara has grown accustomed to hearing these words read and spoken daily, and it is not surprising that, under what may appear to her similar circumstances, she should echo them. She does not compare herself to Christ, only her situation. It is the most bitter moment of her life. The army, which has been her God, is forsaking her. Of course what is really happening is that she is forsaking the army. She has never rightly understood, or perhaps even appreciated its methods, though she has identified herself with its aims.

One Bodger, a distiller of whisky, makes a present of money to the Army, and Undershaft, the millionaire maker of armaments, supplements it. Barbara considers that the Army should accept none of such ill-gotten gains. The Army thinks differently, and holds the very reasonable view that from whatever source the money may proceed the sooner it is turned into a clean channel the better. Barbara has to learn the bitter lesson that, if one is born into the world one must, to some extent, share the world's guilt. One cannot go away and be good all by oneself. The Salvation Army is not really the place for Major Barbara. In some respects she is not good enough for it, in others she is too good. Her ways

and ideals are too delicate and too refined for that pioneering, rough-hewing institution. She is not the right person in the right place, and so she has to find the right place, which she does, paradoxically enough, in the works of Andrew Undershaft. Such a conversion is not altogether a good subject for dramatic treatment, as the theatre is not really an easy place to follow the close and subtle reasoning that leads to the change. Surely an author who employs the drama as a means of expression should have something to express that is best, or at least well, expressed by those means. In my opinion the author errs in his choice of subject, for the theme and contention of Major Barbara could be better conveyed through a novel or better still a sermon or essay. However, Mr. Shaw, having done what his audiences like, can safely make experiments in the direction of his own likes, and "Major Barbara" is one of them. He again shows himself a very close observer of, and sympathizer with, human nature. Barbara herself is a fine character, sturdily sincere and sweetly sensitive. Her lover Cusins is a curious fellow, whose love for Barbara is his strongest point. He will even join the Salvation Army and bang the big drum through the streets of London for her sweet sake. He is perfectly honest about it, however, and explains that it is only for her sake. She is certainly a trying girl to be engaged to.

Andrew Undershaft is a character after Shaw's own heart, all talk and honesty, and he succeeds in drowning even the big drum of the Salvation Army. The remaining members of Barbara's family are very well drawn, especially her poor exasperated mother, utterly at a loss with a husband whose actions are so much better than his professions! The inmates of the Salvation Army

Shelter are a sheer joy. Rummy Mitchens, Peter Shirley, Snobby Price and Bill Walker are all types, and take their place on the line in Mr. Shaw's long gallery of all sorts and conditions of men.

As to the picture of the Salvation Army. It has been held to be an untrue and unfair one. That may or may not be so, but as presented, it only increases our respect for the institution. We are shown a body of people who go about doing good, as they see it; and never giving in, even when their efforts are thrown back into their faces, with as often as not the addition of a broken jaw or a black eye. It takes all sorts to make a world and perhaps it takes all sorts to save one. After seeing "Major Barbara" I, for one, can but come to the conclusion that the Salvation Army knows its own business best and, what is more, minds it.

The last volume of plays at present issued by Mr. Shaw consists of three plays: "The Doctor's Dilemma," "Getting Married," and "The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet".

The first of these is a play with a purpose, perhaps one should say with an ulterior motive, the second the author calls a "Conversation," although "Dramatic discussion" would perhaps be a better description; the third play is surely one of the very best of one-act plays.

The author's object in writing "The Doctor's Dilemma" seems to be that of showing up what he considers to be the false and untenable position of the medical profession at the present day. It shows the utter inability of human opinion calling itself either scientific or moral to upset a person who is a law unto himself and fears neither death nor disgrace, so long as he is true to his own self. Louis Dubedat is such a

person. He cares for no man and no man particularly cares for him, excepting a woman, his wife, who adores him and appreciates his genius and honesty. He is in consumption, and everything that is possible must be done to save such a precious life. A certain famous doctor, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, has discovered, or thinks he has, a certain serum, which if injected in exactly the right way, at exactly the right moment, and by exactly the right person, will cure consumption. Incidentally, Sir Colenso is the right person. Mrs. Dubedat gets the idea fixed into her head that he, and he alone, can save Louis. But, unfortunately, Sir Colenso has got as many patients as he can do with, and applicants are being turned away daily. But Mrs. Dubedat has no intention of being turned away, and sits upon the doorstep until she is admitted. She wisely brings some of her husband's work to show that he is worth saving. After a little demur Sir Colenso comes to the conclusion that perhaps it might be worth making room for Louis, though it may have to be at the sacrifice of another life. But Sir Colenso would like the opinion of some of his colleagues upon the subject, so it is arranged that Mrs. Dubedat and her husband shall lunch with Sir Colenso and several of the colleagues at " The Star and Garter," Richmond, on the following day. They do so. The medicoes are all charmed with Louis and have quite made up their minds that his life is very well worth the saving, when certain facts come to light which show that Louis has very curious and somewhat proprietary ideas upon both money and morals. One way and another he has succeeded in borrowing money from all of them in turn, from the richest to the poorest, and also taken advantage of the legal ignorance of a certain woman

to cause her to commit unintentional bigamy with him! Along with these revelations comes another, that the poorest doctor in the company is himself touched with tuberculosis, and requires treatment from Sir Colenso. But Sir Colenso cannot stretch matters any further in the number of patients, so the choice is between Blenkinsop, the poor doctor, and Louis; between a good man and some good pictures. The question is further complicated by the fact that Sir Colenso is, himself, in love with Mrs. Dubedat, and has a complacent assurance that she is likely to fall in love with him. He has a good flair for that sort of thing! But he makes a genuine effort to look at the thing fairly and squarely, and eventually takes on Blenkinsop and hands Louis over to another practitioner. Then Mrs. Louis has to be faced, and Sir Colenso when telling her his decision gives her his most solemn oath that, under the other doctor's charge, her hero will be preserved to her. And so he will, though not quite in the way she expects. In the following act, and in a splendid death scene, Louis dies, calmly and peacefully, folding his hands on his breast and uttering the following creed:—

"I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of colour, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen."

How many have died with a better one?

A very great man died with a similar one. The words are, I understand, a paraphrase of the last words of Richard Wagner.

In the last act Louis' widow and Sir Colenso meet accidentally at an exhibition of the deceased artist's

work. Sir Colenso is, according to his lights, an honest man, and frankly confesses to Mrs. Dubedat his love and the different reasons why he had, so to speak, killed her husband. He and his doctor friends one and all hoped that Louis would die before his wife discovered what a mean and despicable character he was. The widow accepts the confession and is not at all upset by the accusation. She understands exactly to what Sir Colenso refers, but she also understood Louis and he did not. Neither did his colleagues.

"He made his wife the happiest woman in the world, doctor," says she. "No," says Sir Colenso, "he made his widow the happiest woman in the world; but it was I who made her a widow. And her happiness is my justification and my reward! . . ."

So Mrs. Dubedat forgives him, not because he has made her a happy widow, but because he did what he did for the sake of her happiness, and because he never did and never could understand Louis. Moreover she is not a widow; she has married again, as Louis begged her to with his last breath. "People who have found marriage happy always marry again," said he.

This is the last straw for poor Sir Colenso. He has committed a purely disinterested murder!

To do a good action disinterestedly is trying enough, but to sell one's soul to the devil and then see another fellow get the proceeds, is too bad. No wonder Sir Colenso gives things up as a bad job. That is the plot of "The Doctor's Dilemma". It is certainly original and complicated and a little startling, but there is no doubt at all about its being extraordinarily interesting and arresting, if somewhat difficult to follow and understand. But the effort to understand it is healthy and

stimulating, and one's sympathies are enlarged and broadened after a careful study of the play. The death of Louis is a beautifully written and drawn scene, quite worthy to rank with many other noble death scenes in dramatic literature; in fact it is superior to most of them. Authors, like human nature generally, are rather apt to spread themselves a little when they get to a death scene. They seem almost thoroughly to enjoy the actual death process. So do actors. But Louis' death is very natural and unstrained, he makes no fuss whatever about it, and gives no desperate histrionic opportunities to the actor, nor does Mr. Shaw. The scene has been criticized by some as being in very bad taste. If they are referring to the writing of it, it is surely written in quite exceptionally good taste. If they mean that it is bad taste to attempt to reproduce a death scene on the stage at all, they have been a very long time making the discovery.

The character studies in "The Doctor's Dilemma" are quite up to the usual very high Shaw standard. The group of doctors is splendid. Most of us have been through the hands of one or other of them; some of us of all of them in turn. We have all met the doctor who has discovered that there is really only one complaint, and every one has got it! And there is only one cure for it, the knife. Surgery will have cured all the ills of the flesh when it can amputate the body and remove it from the man, as effectually as it sometimes removes the man from it! We have also the hard-worked and over-worked general practitioner, and the immensely successful poor man's doctor, who guarantees a cure! His guarantee comes off in nine cases out of ten, and the tenth case seldom complains! The bacteri-

ologist and the fashionable physician and the man of science complete the picture. What chance has poor Louis Dubedat against such a galaxy of talent. It is an all star cast, and he is the unfortunate play, going to be sadly cut about at first and afterwards killed. He flabbergasts the faculty a little though, when he asks to be paid for his services! Louis is a capital character, first cousin to Eugene Marjoribanks, and the first self-acknowledged disciple of Bernard Shaw to appear upon the stage. It will be an uncomfortable business for the world when they begin appearing in it. Mr. Shaw has many followers, but few people have, so far, had the courage to be his disciples.

"The Doctor's Dilemma" is generally regarded as an almost criminal indictment of the medical profession, but surely that rather overstates the case, and the object of the play is simply to show the fallibility of this human concept. However we are concerned more with the play itself than with its ultimate object, and again Mr. Shaw scores; he always does when he sets himself to do so. There is little, if anything, wrong with "The Doctor's Dilemma". It is a five-act play, the climax comes in the fourth act, its right place, and the last act closes the incident. The web is complete, drama is expressed in every department, situation, characterization and dialogue, and the author is true to his medium throughout. He has chosen the dramatic medium to convey what he has to convey. His play explains itself, he does not, as he sometimes does, explain it as he goes along, or even comment on it, like Pachmann at the piano. The idea of opening the play upon the morning after Sir Colenso has received his knighthood, and is receiving congratulations, and thus bringing together

the different types necessary to the development of the theme, is capital. Moreover, the doctors are gently drawn with a sympathetic, although slightly ironical and satirical hand. The author has nothing against them personally, and indeed seems to appreciate their work and understand their difficulties.

As I have said, there is practically nothing in the play for the critic to find fault with, and very little for the faculty to cavil at, unless it is the author's main contention, which, if it is false, should be quite easily proved to be so.

The next play in the book is called "Getting Married". It was described upon the programme when it was originally produced at the Haymarket Theatre, as "a conversation," which was exceedingly disarming to those critics, doubtless a good few, who would have refused to regard it as a play. In the little note that precedes it in this volume the author refers to it as a drama of ideas, and that it seems to me most certainly to be.

Alfred Bridgenorth, Bishop of Chelsea, describes himself as "a funny Bishop," and so he is. Neither the Church nor any other institution would be any the worse for many such funny men, in all senses of the word. One of his funniments is a pleasant habit of always listening most respectfully to the Devil and giving him every opportunity of stating his own case, and condemning himself out of his own mouth. Being the Devil he, of course, always does this. If he could justify himself he would be justifiable. The Bishop has long looked upon the institution of marriage, as it is at present constituted, as the very devil, and has always known that, sooner or later, unless something is done to remedy it, there will be a strike against it, as apparently there

was in ancient Rome. He has warned four successive Prime Ministers against this, and has pointed out to them that the strike will begin with the propertied classes, where no Government dare interfere with it. The Prime Ministers have all agreed with him, but have not dared to take the question up seriously because they know that the mere hint of marriage reform will lose them the next election, after which they have generally lost it all the same upon some very much more trivial matter. The good Bishop has been blessed with several daughters. One by one he has given them away in marriage at the altar, and almost breathed a prayer of relief that they have gone so quietly; for he is human and cannot help hoping that the marriage revolt, which he thinks is bound to come, will not begin with his own household. He has only one unmarried daughter left and it is now her marriage morn. The bells are ringing, the congregation assembling, and the organ playing, when the drama begins. The play began a little before that, in the Bishop's kitchen, where we are introduced to the funny Bishop's funny family, funny friends and funny opinions. We are made *au fait* with the situation and introduced to the Bishop's hidden volcano. Suddenly there are signs of an approaching eruption. A distant rumbling is heard from the bedroom of the bride. She has locked herself in and refuses to come out and get married until she has finished reading a certain pamphlet which has just arrived by post. The Bishop gives a gasp, then folds his arms rather grimly and sits quietly back upon the edge of his kitchen table. The revolt has begun. And not in one quarter only, for the bridegroom suddenly appears upon the scenes. He too is on strike. That is to say he would like to be, but

being a gentleman and a man of honour he cannot of course go back upon his plighted word. The only thing he can do is to fulfil it under protest. He has suddenly made the discovery that he will be financially liable for any damages for libel his wife may incur. Whenever she lets out she may let him in! And she is a young lady who lets out at a good many things and people. And as she is the daughter of a Bishop and a good social worker she has no lack of opportunities of expressing her opinion. She has no sense of humour whatsoever, but a very finely developed sense of honour, which compels her to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, quite regardless of the consequences to herself and of the law of libel. She will be as uncomfortable a person to be married to as Major Barbara, and quite as attractive. She does not care what she says when her blood boils, and as the prospective bridegroom plaintively remarks, it boils about once a week! That is his grievance. Hers comes out a little later, when she appears upon the scenes having got so far in her wedding toilet as a dressing jacket and a petticoat. Somebody has sent her a pamphlet entitled, Do You Know What You Are Going To Do? By a Woman Who Has Done It. This is what the woman did, as described by Edith Bridgenorth :—

"She got married. When she had three children—the eldest only four years old—her husband committed a murder, and then attempted to commit suicide, but only succeeded in disfiguring himself. Instead of hanging him, they sent him to penal servitude for life, for the sake, they said, of his wife and infant children. And she could not get a divorce from that horrible murderer. They would not even keep him imprisoned

for life. For twenty years she had to live singly, bringing up her children by her own work, and knowing that just when they were grown up and beginning life this dreadful creature would be let out to disgrace them all, and prevent the two girls getting decently married, and drive the son out of the country perhaps."

"Is that really the law?" says Edith. "Am I to understand that if Cecil (the bridegroom) commits a murder I can't get divorced from him?"

"Yes, my dear. That is so," says the Bishop. "You must take him for better or for worse." Whereupon Edith stoutly declines to enter into any such wicked contract. "What sort of servants? What sort of friends? What sort of Prime Ministers should we have if we took them for better or for worse all their lives?" If Edith had known the law she never would have consented, and yet a knowledge of the law is not considered essential to any part of the marriage service! No questions are asked upon that point! Cecil explains to Edith that he is not going to commit murder, whereupon she asks him how he knows, and implies that there is at least one person whom she would sometimes like to murder. And it is evident that such a spirited young lady would not think much of a man who was not capable of doing the same under certain circumstances. But he need not necessarily be a horrible murderer! However, we are not discussing the plot, but describing it. This is the deadlock. Both parties want to marry, but neither party will be party to the marriage contract as it stands. The only thing to do is to draw up a fresh one, one that will cover all contingencies; an ideal marriage contract, in fact. And this the whole of the party present, representing the different opinions and

different contingencies, decide to put their heads together and do. To do it they call in the aid of the Bishop's chaplain, Father Anthony. This man was formerly a solicitor, and always a saint, whose natural calling was for the Church, and the Bishop seeing in him the ideal combination for the post has ordained him and made him his chaplain. In drawing up an ideal contract Father Anthony is again the right man in the right place. He is a stern celibate, and being thoroughly prejudiced against matrimony at all, will not be likely to pass any flaws in the contract. Of course they do not succeed in doing anything. The whole thing tumbles to pieces in their hands. So Cecil and Edith insure themselves against the particular contingencies they are afraid of, and get married under the impression that they have allowed for all contingencies. For the Bishop's sake we are rather glad. There has only been a threatened eruption and his house has been spared. On the other hand, no one could have suffered the catastrophe more cheerfully and calmly. The object of the play seems to me to point out, in a dramatic way, the utter impossibility of marriage as an *ideal* institution in this world. The author tears the present marriage contract to shreds, but shows us no way of constructing a better one. Perhaps the for better or for worse one is the best possible. Marriage is a makeshift and perhaps we must be content with makeshifts before we can get the perfect article, and the perfect article is only made in heaven. At any rate if the object of "Getting Married" is to show what doing such a thing may amount to, in an extremely entertaining and sometimes very dramatic way, the play certainly seems to fulfil its object thoroughly.

Looked at as a play, pure and simple, it seems to me a very much better one than it is generally given credit for. The author calls it a play of ideas, and so it is, and it must be criticized from that point of view. The clash of ideas takes the place, more or less, of the clash of characters. The ideas put their heads together to bring about a result, and they do it, but it is not quite the result that they expected. In fact the *dénouement* is rather negative, but something does happen all the same.

Constructionally the play is technically quite faultless. Even the classic unities of time, place and plot have been observed. The action, such as it is, takes place in one morning and in one scene. There is only one plot, if there is any at all! The characters are, as usual, capitally drawn. The funny, tolerant Bishop is a splendid character, said to have been suggested to the author by the late Bishop Creighton. It is refreshing to think that it is. When I had the good fortune to see the play he was most beautifully played by Mr. Henry Ainley. The Bishop is the *deus ex machinâ* of this play. If it was not for his gentle restraining hand there would be no play, only a row. Next to him the most interesting character is "Mrs. George," the wife of George Collins, the local mayor. She is a very wonderful woman, about whom her brother-in-law, the greengrocer, who is managing the wedding breakfast, raves so continuously and rhapsodically that his hearers are inclined to think her real name must be Harris. But she is real right enough, and what is more she is a clairvoyante. She goes off into trances during which she gives vent to remarkable utterances, which sound, as her brother-in-law-the greengrocer, says, as if the whole human race were

giving you a little bit of its mind. She is one of those beings who must obey the law of her own instincts. Every time she falls in love with a man, which happens fairly frequently, she feels she *must* go to him, and off she goes, to be brought back to her husband before evening, with no harm done, in three cases out of four. In the fourth case the man runs away from her. With any husband but hers this sort of thing might conceivably lead to a little awkwardness, but he understands her and comforts her. The result of all this is that Mrs. George is tremendously interesting as a woman and invaluable as a counsellor. With the strong approval of the funny Bishop they send for her to assist at the drawing up of the ideal contract. She comes under compulsion, for she is really one of the Bishop's unknown loveresses. She writes him love-letters under a pseudonym, and has arranged a meeting with him in Heaven when they both get there. She has no wish to meet him on earth, but comes at his call. He, of course, has no idea that she is "Incognita Passionata". Soon after she arrives she falls into one of her mesmeric trances and in a beautifully written speech utters what perhaps may be interpreted as the pathetic cry of all her sex. But even this wonderful woman is unable to make much of the marriage contract. But she has learnt something in her struggles to be true to herself. The thing one wants most has nothing to do with marriage at all. "Perhaps," asks she, "Father Anthony has a glimmering of it. Eh, Anthony?" "Christian fellowship?" suggests Father Anthony. "You call it that, do you?" says Mrs. George. "What do you call it?" says Father Anthony But before she can answer, the voice of the Beadle is heard calling the Mayoress to her court. And the curtain

falls. We are evidently never to know what it is Mrs. George has discovered until we discover it for ourselves. An unsatisfactory ending for some, but a stimulant for others.

Other characters in the play are the delightful judicial greengrocer, William Collins, a first cousin to his namesake, the wonderful waiter in "You Never Can Tell"; Edith Bridgenorth, the recalcitrant bride; Cecil Sykes, the startled bridegroom; Boxer Bridgenorth, a silly sentimental General, eating his flabby heart out because his brother, the Bishop's, wife's sister Lesbia, will not marry him, nor anybody else. She is an old maid on principle. St. John Hotchkiss is a very Shavian character, another John Tanner, in some respects, with that gentleman's fearlessness and absence of any false sense of shame. A man whose reputation is as bad as his character is good. He says things that shock everybody, but has a record that would not smirch a saint. Whilst he has the greatest possible contempt for the world's opinions, he has the greatest respect for its feelings and never hurts them except for its good.

There is, of course, no end of talk in the play; it *is* a talk, but all the same there is plenty of dramatic incident, and there are dramatic moments, as when the Bishop hears for the first time that the rebellion has begun in his own home. It is also a dramatic moment when he first comes face to face with Mrs. George and learns that she is "Incognita Passionata". It is rather a dramatic moment when Mrs. George appears on the scenes at all, as everyone had begun to doubt her existence. But, as the author says, it is a drama of ideas, and appeals to one's perception rather than to one's senses. But there is one scene that is sufficiently earthly, that

in which Mrs. George pursues Hotchkiss, who has unaccountably fallen in love with her, with the poker. He has cornered her badly and it is, under the circumstances, the only argument.

"Getting Married" is a curious play and one that is, perhaps, best when read, but I do not believe that the last has, by any means, been seen or heard of it.

The last play in the book is the one-acter entitled "The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet," the public production of which was censored in England, and so it crossed over the water and was produced in Dublin, where under certain conditions, the censor is powerless. Another injustice to England! "Blanco Posnet" was censored, I understand, on the grounds that it was blasphemous, or rather that it was not blasphemous in the approved and recognized constitutional manner, as when we speak of "an act of God" if a man-made railway station collapses and kills half a hundred people, or talk glibly of a "divine dispensation" at the sinking of the "Titanic". "Blanco Posnet" as a play is not blasphemous at all. On the contrary it is a deeply religious and sincere piece of work. Its one short act is worth a very great deal more than all the acts of "The Third Floor Back" and "The Sign of the Cross" put together. Blanco Posnet, the hero of the play, *is*, it is true, rather blasphemous. The play deals with his conversion, but even when he is converted a man cannot, all at once, change the habits of a life-time. So when something happens to show Blanco that there really is a force that he knew nothing about, he talks about it in much the same language as he did before, but with his vehemence increased in proportion to his respect. The censor probably wanted this language toned down a little, which would

have meant watering the play and weakening the lesson.

Blanco Posnet is a wild Broncho Buster, or whatever they call it, out West. He has a brother who has been a hard drinker in his youth, but has now settled down as a pious fraud, and is known in the little wild-west town as Elder Daniells. The mother of the two men has died, and Elder Daniells, after the manner of his tribe, has succeeded in grabbing the whole of the inheritance, and will not even let Blanco have his mother's necklace for a keepsake; so Blanco, to get his own back, steals his brother's horse and rides away on it under cover of darkness. Unfortunately the horse did not belong to Daniells, but had been borrowed by him from young Strapper, who, in his turn, had borrowed it from his brother, the Sheriff. Blanco ought to have known that his brother's horse was probably not his own. However, there it is. And there is a hue and cry, and they give chase and find Blanco without the horse, just standing on the prairie looking at a rainbow. They bring him before the Sheriff with every intention of hanging him, but they must first prove that he took the horse, and they must find the horse. That will not be difficult. There is a certain woman in the town, who is also of the town, Euphemia Evans, commonly known as "Feemy". Feemy undertakes to swear that she saw Blanco riding away on the horse. She has done nothing of the sort, but is furious with him because he never has had and never will have anything to say to her, or do with her. So she is determined to swear his life away. Then there is a commotion outside. They have found the horse. A strange woman comes in, dressed in black and looking the

picture of misery. She was found sitting by the roadside, her child dead in her lap and the missing horse grazing near her. At the sight of her, Blanco gets into a quiver of superstitious terror, and evidently regards her as a being from another world. She in her turn apparently looks upon him as an angel sent from Heaven. Seeing how the land lies and that he is to be hanged for stealing the horse, she swears she stole it; then when that will not hold she confesses that she got the horse from the man that did steal it, but denies that Blanco was that man. She wanted the horse to get her child, who was dying from croup, to the doctor in time. The man, after a little persuasion, gave her the horse and then strode away crying and laughing and singing wicked words to hymn tunes.

The court is now in a delicate position. If Blanco was the man, and had stolen the horse, they cannot very well put the woman into the position of either having to give him away or commit perjury. On the other hand they are not anxious for a horse-thief to get off scot free owing to a lady's delicacy. So Feemy Evans is put on her oath, and Blanco's life depends on her word. But when it comes to swearing away Blanco's life she breaks down and owns up that she has never seen him on the horse at all, Blanco taunting her the while with such expressions as "Softy! Cry-baby! Landed like me. Doing what you never intended!" and so on!

Blanco is acquitted. Commandeering a horse for the purpose of getting a dying child to the doctor is not stealing. It is not *exactly* what Blanco did, but it is quite near enough. What he did do was practically to put his own head into the noose for the sake of the

dying child. For without the horse he was certain to be caught, so he made no attempt to get away, but just sat down on the veldt and gazed at a rainbow. Written in green on the red streak of the rainbow were the words: "I've got the cinch on you this time, Blanco Posnet!" and Blanco was gazing at them fascinated when he felt Strapper's grab upon his arm and Squinty's on his pistol. But why did Blanco give the horse up? Because he could not help himself. "Because of Him!" and Blanco points upwards, this being the only manner he has of expressing a power outside of himself. Naturally he feels a little sore with Him. He has not been altogether fairly treated. "He comes like a thief in the night," says Blanco, quoting from the Bible and speaking from personal experience. And it is this that causes him to taunt Feemy with being unable to commit perjury and with doing what she never intended. Feemy has been caught the same way as he was.

Then Blanco proceeds to preach to the boys a sermon on the day's proceedings; as convincing a sermon as they ever listened to, for it is preached from experience, not hearsay. "There are two games being played," says Blanco in effect. "One is a fine game and the other is a rotten one. You will be allowed to play the rotten one until just such a time as you are wanted for the fine one, and then, willy-nilly, to it you will have to go, whether you like it or not, like I did. And," says Blanco, "it didn't feel rotten; it felt bully, just bully."

Then Blanco puts a poser to the boys. Which of them will marry Feemy? They are not anxious. Well, Blanco will. Feemy is a failure as a bad woman, and Blanco is a failure as a bad man. So they had better let Brother Daniells marry them to keep the

rottenness in the family. But Feemy is not going to marry a man that cannot do a decent action without surprising himself out of his senses.

Presently the others all go out of the room and leave Blanco and Feemy alone together. The following dialogue then takes place.

BLANCO. (*To Feemy, offering his hand.*) Shake, Feemy.

FEEMY. Get along, you blackguard.

BLANCO. It's come over me again, same as when the kid touched me. Shake, Feemy.

FEEMY. Oh well, here. (*They shake hands.*)

And so the worst man and the worst woman in the town meet on common ground. They have each made a momentous discovery. They are not as bad as they thought they were, and they cannot help themselves when the right time comes, so there is nothing to be pleased with themselves about, only a sensation of real peace.

"The Publican and the Harlot" might well be an alternative title to this really great little one-act play. Its story speaks for itself, and comment is superfluous. The rainbow incident offends some critics, who consider it far-fetched. But Blanco is very far-fetched, out of the very depths! And he is a mass of superstition and probably well accustomed to seeing things. It must be remembered that he is convinced that the mother and child are unreal, emissaries sent to entrap him. A man who is accustomed to believe nothing because he sees nothing, is just the kind to believe *anything* when something happens. And why should the writing on the rainbow be slang? Possibly for the same reason that the writing on the wall was Persian, or whatever

language it was, so that it could be understood by the reader. Of course all these things are speculative, but they may be simpler and less objective than we think or know. But apart from all such speculation "The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet" is a rattling, racy comedy, for it is a comedy, written with tremendous verve; and some day the censor will remove his ban.

Since writing "Blanco Posnet" Mr. Shaw has had one important new long play produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, under Charles Frohman's short-lived Repertory project. I had not the good fortune to see it, and it is not yet published. But no less a person than Mr. William Poel has pronounced it to be one of the author's greatest plays. He has written three other trifles that should be mentioned here. "Press-Cuttings," a one-act play, which was censored because it contained presentments of certain well-known statesmen. A few years previously Mr. Shaw had himself been harmlessly teased and reproduced on the stage by a distinguished fellow-dramatist, but that was not censored, so the law evidently is a respecter of persons.

"The Dark Lady of the Sonnets" was produced at the Haymarket Theatre, at a special *matinée* in aid of a National Theatre. The scene is the Tower, close upon midnight. William Shakespeare has an assignation with his dark lady. Queen Elizabeth is doing something in that line too, at the same time and place. Of course they mistake each other for each other's quarry. When Will Shakespeare discovers his mistake he seizes the opportunity to beg, in a magnificent speech, a grant from Her Majesty for a National Theatre. "The time is not ripe yet," says the Queen; "come again in three hundred years;" which brings us

to to-day, and that is the point of the play. The little trifle is beautifully written, and the portrait of Shakespeare is very amusing. Mr. Shaw represents him as a sort of Autolycus, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles of speech and unconscious poetry. The very expression which we quote, with "The rest is silence" and many others he gets from a quite unconscious natural poet in the shape of a beefeater.

It is all very amusing, but not altogether convincing. Shakespeare was surely a person more likely to let these little things fall than to pick them up. On the other hand, of course, he would never have let them pass.

The third one-act play was a play called "Overruled," produced at the Duke of York's Theatre in conjunction with two other one-act plays by Sir James Barrie and Sir Arthur Pinero. Sir James Barrie's play is the only one of the three that has survived.

Recently a three-act play called "Fanny's First Play" was produced at the Little Theatre. Although the authorship has so far, I believe, never been publicly acknowledged, it is an open secret that it is by Mr. Shaw. There are certainly very strong internal evidences that it is. The exceptional wide-awakeness as to what is going on around us at the present time, as shown in the play; the gentle hint as to what may happen next, shown in the girl's attitude to her father, and in the ducal footman are both very Shavian. The Frenchman's speech could surely only have been written by Bernard Shaw or under his tuition; the exceptionally good and broad characterization, and the sympathetic portrayal and comprehensive understanding of Darling Dora, are Bernard Shaw at his very best. Who else, too, could have and would have dared poke such fun at the critics in the pro-

logue and epilogue? And from whom else would the critics have taken it so calmly? And last but not least there are two other very typical little Shavian touches in the epilogue. The delicate compliment to Granville Barker, implied in Fanny's awe when some one hints that her play may have been written by him, and the graceful compliment to the company upon which the curtain falls at the finish. I have had the good fortune to be present at more than one of Mr. Shaw's public utterances and debates, and although he is a hard fighter, a hard hitter and a very skilful fencer, I have often noticed these gentle little touches by which he sometimes softens the wounds he has inflicted or is about to inflict.

There are those who still affect to regard Bernard Shaw as a purely destructive force in drama as well as in everything else. We are only concerned with the dramatist. Far from being a destructive force in that direction he has perhaps done more than any one else to wake up the modern English drama, and is chiefly responsible for the really extraordinary renaissance which has taken place in the last decade. Before he and one or two others came on the scenes it was almost in a dying condition. One or two very distinguished authors were busily whacking the half-dead horse, when along came Mr. Shaw with his new young animal, which at first frightened folk by kicking out rather lustily, but later enchanted them with the wonderful swiftness and sureness of its paces, and with its curious little tricks and reversals of the normal order of things. Mr. Shaw did not come with an entire set of new situations, and new plots, but brought a new point of view to bear on the old ones. Moreover, he saw the old plots

in new places. He found them in places where no one had ever thought of looking for them before. As a rule plays had been written round the very poor or the very well-to-do. Mr. Shaw promptly tapped the middle class, which did not at first much like the tapping. He found interesting and sympathetic plays in places in which the average mortal may take some interest, but to which he, as a rule, takes very little sympathy. Mr. Shaw went there with all his sympathies. He has widened the field and scope of the drama immensely. No other living writer has covered such an enormous area, or peopled it with such a wide variety of characters. To my sense, Mr. Shaw excels in that department more than any other present-day writer, and it is largely owing to his skill in this respect that he is able to be so extraordinarily interesting and fiercely entertaining. The way in which he says a thing is always excellent, even if the thing itself is not always sound. It always sounds sound, I admit. Mr. Shaw is an artist and an artist is always plausible; but occasionally he leaves out a very important consideration, sometimes the human element, to make his point, as in Napoleon's estimate of the English. On the other hand it is, of course, not fair to accuse him of sharing the opinions of all his characters. Like most authors he suffers a great deal in that respect, both from his friends and his enemies, probably the more severely from his friends. Shavians are like Baconians, often far worse in fact, for Baconians, to do them justice, generally know something about the writings of two men, whilst many Shavians know only one, and think that because they have heard a thing for the first time from the mouth of their idol, it has never been said before or by any one

else. But, I repeat, there is nothing wrong with the way in which Mr. Shaw says anything, and many of his characters will live. Here again some critics say they are all Bernard Shaws, a most exaggerated statement. Occasionally as in John Tanner, Richard Dudgeon and St. John Hotchkiss, he does perhaps figure in them a little, but the plays are as much brighter, livelier and better for his presence as the world is. But Lady Cecily Wayneflete, Mrs. George, Major Barbara, Candida, Edith Bridgenorth, Norah Reilly, Mrs. Dubedat, Mrs. Warren and her daughter, Anne Whitefield, Darling Dora, Cleopatra, Julius Cæsar, Bishop Bridgenorth, Father Keegan, Eugene Marjoribanks, Louis Dubedat, Lickcheese, Burgess, Peter Shirley, 'Enery Straker, Boxer Bridgenorth and Blanco Posnet are as comprehensive a group of character studies as have graced and disgraced the stage since the days of Shakespeare and Falstaff. Indeed, perhaps no English author since his day has had such a broad and comprehensive grasp on human nature, or made use of so many different types. And this brings me to another point. Mr. Shaw is often supposed to be all brain with no heart or human sympathy, but is it not his very sympathy that so often shocks his audiences? They may think that it is their susceptibilities and refined natures that are being shocked, but more often than not it is their vanity. They see the hearts of Mrs. Warren or Darling Dora being exposed, and find that the difference between themselves and the character on the stage is not so great as they thought it was, and is often on the wrong side. So they say Shaw shocks them when what he really does is to make them shock themselves. And if he has no heart how can he draw the human heart so

well? It takes the heart to reach the heart. Can any one possibly claim that Mrs. George, Major Barbara, Darling Dora, the Bishop and Mrs. Bridgenorth, Keegan, Norah Reilly and Peter Shirley are not creations of the heart?

Constructionally Mr. Shaw is said to be weak. He is occasionally wicked and likes going off the rails on to the special pleader's, theorist's and propagandist's lines. Drama, it seems to me, is a *practical* exposure of an engine working or of the working of an engine; not the explanations of the engineer who shows one round, and the better the engine is, the better it explains itself. When Mr. Shaw behaves himself as a dramatist and sets out to construct a play one may go over it with a plumb-line and a pair of compasses in one hand and a copy of Aristotle in the other and one will not find very much wrong! Of his witty facility and pungency in dialogue it is really unnecessary to speak. Every one appreciates his powers in that direction, and will risk a bad shock or two to enjoy them.

So much for Mr. Shaw as a constructive force. As a destructive one he is less pleasant but perhaps very healthy. He shows us the fallibility of all human concepts, upsets our ideas of right and wrong considerably and puts us very generally into a very uncomfortable if healthy frame of mind. As an agitator and social worker he is evidently of the opinion that he must knock down before building up, but as a dramatist he must begin by putting something up. It is in that direction that we have been concerned with him. It is in that direction that we like him best, and it is perhaps in that direction that the world will remember him best. If he should ever happen to read these words he may

quote the lines: "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is often interred with their bones". Perhaps so, but some men's evil is better than other men's good. A certain critic once shook his finger very solemnly in Mr. Shaw's face, and told him that the world was waiting—waiting for the great play from him. Personally, and with the deepest gratitude for what has gone before, I am quite content to wait for the *next* one, and to take my chance of its being great.

VALEDICTORY—A PROSPECT.

Prospects for the English drama were never brighter than they are at the present moment. The group of dramatists mentioned at the close of the introductory chapter are as promising a group as any that have been mentioned throughout the whole of this volume. And they are not the only group. The Irish National Theatre Society has produced a crop of purely native talent, headed by J. M. Synge, that must surely be unique in dramatic annals. The reason for this upspringing all round is the old one of the demand creating the supply, or rather of the demand and the supply occurring simultaneously, as they always do. And the ground has been properly prepared for cultivation by the foundation of the repertory theatres in different parts of the kingdom, the increasing and broader public interest in the drama, and the increasing number of theatres that are run on independent lines, and not solely dependent upon the ideas or whims of one individual. I do not mean to say that that is necessarily a bad way of running them, but it is by no means the only way. There is no " only way " in dramatic art any more than in any other form of expression; and actors, authors, and producers alike are at last awaking to the fact that

there is more than one right kind of theatre, more than one right sort of play, more than one right method of production! Rudyard Kipling writes somewhere, I think, that "There are over thirty different ways to write a tribal lay, and every single one of them's the right one"—or words to that effect. There may be over fifty million different ways to write a tragic play, and every single one of them the right one! There is an infinite variety in art, and because one has caught a glimpse of one facet of the diamond one has not necessarily perceived the whole gem, and never will, for it is infinite. Human nature appears to waste a lot of time in trying to round off the infinite. It is sometimes remarked, for instance, that in matters theatrical we are slowly but surely returning to the old order and the apron stage, that in a few years' time there will be no such thing as a "picture" theatre in London. I do not mean a cinematograph show, but of that more anon. We are slowly but surely learning to appreciate the old apron stage, to preserve it, and to play upon it such plays as were written for it, perhaps even to write plays for it, but certainly to present old plays under the conditions for which they were written and to treat them fairly. But at the present moment when an apron stage is wanted it has to be built, and does not, as a rule, harmonize with the rest of the theatre, for there is only one kind of theatre in London, only one instrument, and intending players are practically compelled to master that, however well they might play some other one, if they would play at all. But why have only one instrument, why not have an orchestra?

With a greater variety of treatment there has also

grown up a greater variety of theme and object in drama. Plays are written nowadays to thrill, to excite, to amuse, harrow, expose, suggest, construct, destroy, instruct, discuss, propound. Any one of these objects is sufficient to justify writing a play if the play is a good one, but the best motive in the world does not excuse a bad play. And the play must interest the audience for whom it is designed, or it is a bad play. And as most theatres are built to accommodate all sorts and conditions of men, the plays must interest all sorts if the theatres are to be kept open, and not to be always half empty. Perhaps we shall have all one-price theatres in the future. I do not mean by that, that all the seats in all theatres will be all one price, but special theatres will cater for special audiences with special plays.

Many themes which were a few years ago considered as being too sacred for exposition in a theatre are now used daily. In a few years' time, when the censor has returned whence he came, the most serious subjects will be treated in the most serious way, and the drama will no longer be driven in blinkers like a restive horse that the public is nervous in driving. There has always been more fear of the immense power of the drama to show up some ugly secrets than trust in its ability to reveal hidden beauties. The censor as an institution protects the public against that knowledge of itself which might help it to free itself. But this state of things is being slowly but surely changed, and the drama as a means of expression will no longer be dammed or damned!

Edward Gordon Craig is another great force in modern dramatic development. He is, perhaps, a genius in his way, but his, too, is not the only way, although he

almost seems to think it is. But it is certainly a very fine way.

I spoke just now of cinema theatres. The cinematograph has come to stay, and it has come to conquer not to vanquish. It has been said that it will eventually vanquish the theatres, but it will only teach them to mind their own business. And in any case it will never vanquish art or the drama, and they will both eventually conquer it. Cinematography opens up immense possibilities, which will one day be appreciated and grasped by great writers and artists. Some day the rival camps of Shakespeare producers may shake hands over a cinematographic performance which will combine itself with phonography so wonderfully as to be able to reproduce the whole of, say, Hamlet, with all its sounds and sights, and portray in some measure the panorama and pageant as well as the poetry of Shakespeare's mind. But of course with a dead author this will not be so possible as with a living one, and living and great ones will be there. At the present moment this form of expression is mostly in the hands of commercialists and some uncommonly good actors, but they will not always have things all their own way. Cinema theatres and playhouses will mutually benefit each other in the long run. There are some things which the cinema theatre can do, but which the playhouse never can do and vice versâ. Each will do what it is most fitted to do and can do best. It is the same with regard to theatres and music halls. Artistically they have nothing to fear from each other. Commercially, music halls are, I should imagine, the better speculation, but I do not think they will ever close the doors of the theatre, but may drive it to seek and find the place where it will flourish best. Or it

may be State-supported and we may have State and municipal theatres all over the land, "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd" by many. They may be right, but surely to establish or endow art is a very, very doubtful experiment. It has been tried, in a sense, with the art of painting, but the Royal Academy is not by any means unanimously accepted as a successful institution. And England is, perhaps, scarcely the country to carry such a project through in the way it should be done. One cannot help seeing the National Theatre of the future, as a sooty, grey, renaissance building, not quite so imposing as it should have been because the supporting columns were curtailed along with the expense. It is situated in Trafalgar Square, under the eye of Nelson and the shadow of his Column, and, with the National Gallery, the Union Club and Morley's Hotel, completes an imposing group of buildings for the finest site in the world! It is in charge of Sir Roundabout Turnstile, Kt., D.N.T. (Director, National Theatre), who has been a capital actor in his day, and is quite safe on or off the stage, for he is a married man and a total abstainer. The directorship carries a knighthood along with it and a thousand a year, "a fine coming-in for one man," especially when he can no longer be sure of earning it.

There is very grave danger of the proposal culminating in something of this sort. A national theatre is usually compared, in speeches made on the subject, to the National Gallery and British Museum. But the parallel is not complete, for it is surely a very much bigger business to put Shakespeare on the stage than Rembrandt on the wall. Moreover the National Theatre, as mooted, seems destined to consist of the National Gallery and the

Royal Academy in one. It is to preserve the past and cultivate the future. It will have its hands full. Perhaps the difficulties in presenting in the same building plays so widely different as, say, those of Shakespeare and Shaw, are not insuperable; indeed Granville Barker has surmounted them very successfully, but, personally, if there is to be a subsidy at all, I think that a national grant, when a worthy object is in view, would perhaps meet the case better than a theatre. We might save a great play as we sometimes save a great picture. At any rate it seems to me a very, very risky experiment, and it would be wise to go gently at first, especially when we have before our eyes the sad example of the Millionaire's Theatre fiasco in New York. In contrast one may point to the Comédie Française. I have read far too many French plays not to know that the average Frenchman loves that institution like he does his dear old grandfather. I believe that endowment and establishment is apt to be as fatal to art as it is to religion, and that lethargy and self-deception result therefrom. Many people will go to the National Theatre simply because it is the correct and fashionable thing to do, just as many people go to church or the Royal Academy.

The vision that I like to see has at present, though I am open to conviction, no national *theatre* in it, but it has a national drama, a drama that expresses itself in many different ways, by many different means, through many different channels. And every one minds his own business, and is so busy attending to it that he has no time to find fault with anyone else's. The result of this is that he does it so well that he draws all men after him, and the badly and wrongly conducted businesses die of sheer inanition, for want of patrons. There

is no railing, scolding, or jealous criticism, and Drama proceeds unmolested on her stately way, until all people of every class and clan wake up to perceive that they can enjoy this interesting aspect of Art and of Life.

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